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ABSTRACT

Establishing and maintaining effective partnerships with families and members of the community are among the most challenging tasks facing educators today. This book explores why these partnerships are difficult to create and how they can be established. The book attempts to help educators understand that they have little control over changing the attitudes and actions of family members and community members until they first address the negative attitudes that prevail among many school staffs. The chapters in the guide are: (1) "Beyond Open Houses, Fund Raisers, and Room Mothers: What Research Tells Us about Parent Involvement"; (2) "Barriers to Involvement"; (3) "Sharing Policies and Procedures: Creating an Effective School Handbook"; (4) "Read All about It! Creating Effective Written Communications for Classrooms and Schools"; (5) "Getting to Know You...Open Houses and Parent Programs"; (6) "Planning and Delivering and Effective Parent Education Program"; (7) "The 'Whys' and 'Hows' of Home Visiting"; (8) "Assessment and the Reporting of Pupil Progress"; (9) "Planning and Implementing Effective Parent Conferences"; (10) "Getting Parents and Community Members Involved: Keys to an Effective Volunteer Program"; (11) "School-Community Partnerships: Fostering Positive Public Relations"; (12) "Empowering Parents to Serve as Advocates for the Education of Their Children"; and (13) "Building a Comprehensive Plan for Family and Community Involvement." Two appendices list suggested books and print resources for a parent library, and videotapes for parent education. (HTH)

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UNITING SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

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The Parent Difference

Uniting School, Family, and Community

Revised Edition

by
Kathy Barclay and Elizabeth Boone

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Dedication

We gratefully acknowledge the many educators and researchers whose work we cite in this book. They have illuminated our understanding of the challenges and exciting possibilities facing educators committed to achieving partnerships with families and with the community. Without their efforts, this book would not have been possible. We also thank our colleagues for supporting us with their time and for their genuine interest in our work. Finally, we thank the members of our families, especially our husbands, for their unceasing love and support that literally sustained us in the writing of this book.

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Foreword

In this book we acknowledge the very difficult job of establishing and maintaining effective partnerships with families and members of the community. It is probably the most challenging task facing educators today. We use the words *families* and *parents* interchangeably, recognizing the many varied patterns existing in society today. One of our goals in writing this book was to discover why these partnerships are so difficult to create, even though there exists a wealth of research documenting the many advantages of home-school-community partnerships. Most educators seem to blame parents; some blame teachers; and often principals are cited for a lack of enthusiasm, support, and leadership.

What we attempt to do in this book is to help educators understand that they have little control over changing attitudes and actions of family members and community members—*until* they first address the negative attitudes that prevail among many school staffs. Many teachers and administrators, overwhelmed by the effort that building partnerships requires and unconvinced that these partnerships will make any significant difference, continue to view family members as an intrusion into their classrooms and schools. Developing partnerships with *all* families and with the community-at-large must be an ongoing part of the school mission. Educators must stop thinking of parent-community involvement as something separate from curriculum planning and execution and begin to see it for what it can be: an important component of all aspects of the curriculum. When this happens, we believe educators will realize that building a strong three-way partnership is one of the most important things we can do for students.

Kathy Barclay
Elizabeth Boone

Chapter 1

Beyond Open Houses, Fund Raisers, and Room Mothers: What Research Tells Us about Parent Involvement

A note from Kathy . . .

In the parent and community involvement course that I regularly teach at Western Illinois University, I always expect to spend the first several class periods convincing teachers and administrators that family involvement does *make a difference. The fact that these students, for the most part, elect to take this course as part of their graduate program does not guarantee immediate acceptance of their role and responsibilities insofar as building strong partnerships with their students' parents is concerned. Rather, teachers (in particular) want* proof *that the time and energy needed to organize a parent involvement program will yield significant gains in student achievement and behaviors. This chapter provides both teachers and administrators with that proof—and sets the stage for later chapters that provide strategies for building strong and lasting partnerships.*

In his discussion of the results of the 1981 Gallup Poll (Gallup 1981, 31), George Gallup stated:

> A careful examination of survey findings for the past ten-year period leads to this conclusion: Many of the problems of the schools can be solved only if parents become more involved than they presently are in the educational process. Parents must, in fact, be regarded as part of the teaching team. A joint effort by parents and teachers is essential to deal more successfully with problems of discipline, motivation, and the development of good work habits at home and in school.

In the fifteen years since Gallup's 1981 call for the creation of strong teacher-parent partnerships, educators have witnessed the establishment of a variety of programs designed to strengthen parental involvement in the education of children. And, in virtually every demographic group, agreement exists with respect to the importance of parent involvement. In fact, ninety-six percent of the public answered "Very Important" in response to this question on the twenty-fifth Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools : "How important do you think it is to encourage parents to take a more active part in educating their children?" (Elam, Rose, and Gallup 1993, 149).

Parents share the sentiments expressed by the public in response to the Gallup Poll. In a recent survey conducted by the National PTA, parents revealed a clear understanding of the importance of their involvement in the education of their children. Of the parents surveyed by the PTA, ninety-five percent favored schools having written plans for parental involvement. Reasons supporting the advocacy of written plans included greater school success and the provision of guidance for parents to help their children with home-learning activities (Klein et al. 1993).

Despite calls to establish bonds between the home and the school, and despite the fact that parent involvement is seen by many as desirable and even essential, the majority of the nation's schools have yet to move "beyond the bake sale" (Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms 1989) in terms of their primary expectations for parents. Candy bar sales and spaghetti dinners often dominate the agenda at meetings of the parent-teacher organization. "Good parents" are seen as those who consistently volunteer their services to the school, as well as attend most, if not all, school events. Children are "bribed" with stickers and other prizes to get their parents to attend Open Houses and parent conferences. And teachers bemoan the fact that the parents who do attend these events "aren't the ones who really need to be there."

Are we confusing *involvement* with *attendance*? According to the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, "Parental involvement is the support and participation of parents at home and at the school site that directly and positively affects the educational progress of their children." Why is it that so few schools have yet to extend invitations to parents to be part of the teaching team? A thorough understanding of the research in the area of parent involvement is critical if schools truly desire home-school partnerships that impact positively on students. In this chapter we examine the existing research in parent involvement, paying particular attention to those programs that yield the greatest benefits in terms of student achievement, motivation, and desire to learn. Before continuing your reading, however, we invite you to take a few moments to respond to the questions printed below. The answers you give may help you in identifying your current beliefs regarding parent involvement, as well as the practices you support in your school or district.

For your consideration . . .

1. Parents should be recognized as the most important teachers of their children.
   Yes/No
2. Leadership in the school has a major role to play in parent involvement.
   Yes/No
3. Parents have a right to be involved in some aspect of decision making for their child and the school.
   Yes/No

4. Teachers have a responsibility to encourage input from families and to help parents become better teachers of their children.
   Yes/No
5. Most parents only want to be involved; they do not want to "take over" the school.
   Yes/No
6. Good family involvement serves to "showcase" a good school.
   Yes/No
7. Good family involvement makes success for the child easier.
   Yes/No
8. Parents and other family members should feel as if the school is "their school."
   Yes/No
9. Schools should actively encourage frequent, open, and two-way home-school communications.
   Yes/No
10. Most parents want the school to tell them how they can help their child at home.
   Yes/No

Positive answers on your part show a belief system that is supported by the research we will share with you in this chapter and throughout the book.

Review of Research

When one considers the complex nature of families and the many variables that cannot be controlled or accounted for, it is surprising to find so many research studies conducted in the area of parent involvement. There is a solid base of research supporting a joint effort of parents, teachers, students, and the community to increase the effectiveness of the educational program (Nurss et al. 1992; Gordon 1978; Grau, Weinstein, and Walberg 1983; Rich 1985; Epstein 1984; Henderson 1988.) Studies relating parent participation in education to student achievement—as well as those that reveal significant influences in attitudes of parents, teachers, and students—will be discussed. Finally, findings from several exemplary programs will be shared.

Effects on attitudes and behaviors. Some of the strongest immediate effects of teacher's efforts to involve families are on parents' attitudes and behaviors (Epstein 1986, 1993). For example, parents reported an increase in interactions with their children when teachers made parent involvement a regular practice (Becker and Epstein 1982). Additionally, findings suggest that frequent use of parent involvement in learning activities that take place within the home result in greater understanding about the school programs and higher ratings of teacher performance (Epstein 1986). In Epstein's (1986) study involving the parents of approximately five hundred students in eighty-two first-, third-, and fifth-grade classrooms, teachers using parent involvement techniques were recognized by parents for their efforts and were rated higher than other teachers on interpersonal and teaching skills. The parents in this study were asked if the teacher "worked hard at getting parents excited about helping their child at home, whether they received most ideas for home learning from the teacher, and whether the teacher made it clear that they should help their child with homework" (285). Although fewer parents of fifth-grade students indicated that the teacher worked hard to involve parents or gave them many ideas to use at home, the data reveal that when teachers of any grade level involve parents frequently in home-learning activities, they can positively affect the parents' awareness of the teachers' efforts and knowledge about the school program. In their findings of parents' attitudes and practices of involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools, Dauber and Epstein (1993) report that parents were emphatic in their desire for teachers and schools to advise them about how to help their children at home at each grade level. Parents of young children and more-educated parents reported conducting more activities at home that support their children's schooling; however, parents from all backgrounds who were guided by teachers on how to help at home spent more minutes helping with homework than did other parents.

In a recent statewide study, more than thirty thousand parents of elementary school children in Missouri responded to questions about their involvement (Klein et al. 1993). Overall, 31 percent of the parents surveyed reported being "very involved," with 47 percent characterizing themselves as at least "somewhat involved." In this survey of over one hundred school districts, some differences were noted in the extent of parental involvement between rural and urban schools. Rural parents were twice as likely to report frequent communications with teachers and involvement with after-school activities as were parents from urban schools. With respect to family structure, single parents reported participation on the same level as two-parent families; however, relationships did exist between family income, education, and levels of participation. Families with higher income levels and more education did report greater involvement.

Characteristics of teachers most often evaluated by parents as "good teachers" have been identified in studies conducted by Epstein (1985, 1986). Teachers receiving the highest ratings from parents communicate frequently with families, request their participation in home-learning activities, and display warmth, trust, and respect in dealings with parents. Similarly, principals rate as higher in overall teaching ability those teachers who frequently involve parents in the education of their children (Epstein 1985).

Effects on student achievement and school performance. Parental involvement has been found to have long-term effects on school performance (Consortium 1983; Henderson 1987). Children whose parents are involved in their education have better grades, test scores, long-term academic achievement, attitudes, and behavior than those with uninvolved parents (Henderson 1988; Epstein 1982). In a longitudinal study of 293 third- and fifth-grade students in Baltimore City, Epstein (1991b) examined the effects over time of teachers' practices of parent involvement on student achievement test scores. Results indicate significant effects on changes in reading achievement from fall to spring for children in the classrooms of teachers who were leaders in parent involvement. In her discussion of the findings, Epstein reports (271) a

> dramatic improvement in reading and math scores for third-and fifth-grade city students in this sample from fall to spring. Gains in reading achievement are influenced sharply by several sources including the teachers' leadership in parent involvement, the teachers' overall quality of instruction, the students' need to improve, the quality of the students' homework, the parents' education, and the parents' improved knowledge about the school program.

As to the gains in math achievement, Epstein's study suggests that grade level, methods of teaching math, and traditional homework assignments may have had more of an impact than teacher use of parent involvement strategies.

Johnson and Walker (1991), in their longitudinal study of the effects of a program designed for parents and their children, ages one through three, found significantly higher performance for program children in their second through fifth grades of school as compared to their peers who had not experienced the program between the ages of one and three. The Houston Parent-Child Development Center is a two-year parent-child education program for low-income Mexican-American families (Johnson and Walker 1991). Follow-up evaluations of this program indicate that although program children do not differ in retention in grade or referral to special-education classes, on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills program children achieved at a significantly higher level than did children in the control group. Also, on teacher ratings of classroom behavior, program children were rated as less hostile. In his analysis of the data, Carrillo (1988) obtained results indicating that criticism and lack of maternal warmth for children at age three predicted problem behaviors in elementary school. Similar results have been found by other researchers (Feiring, McGuffog, and Jaskir 1984; McGowen and Johnson 1984). Insofar as the Houston Parent-Child Development Center program is concerned, results of the follow-up evaluation of the program's effect on child-school performance in the second through fifth grades suggest that family background factors, such as a stimulating early home environment and affectionate and encouraging parent-child relationships, are conducive to school success. Involvement in the parent-child education program, coupled with the existence of these family background factors, is believed to have contributed to greater school achievement (Johnson and Walker 1991).

Training Parents to Be Effective Teachers of Their Own Children

A number of programs have been designed to train parents to serve as better teachers for their children. According to Dorothy Rich (1985) of the Home-School Institute, tutoring is one of the best ways for parents to participate in public education. She notes that tutoring can be as simple as reading a book or discussing a television show. Or it may include meeting with a teacher to learn strategies to use during in-home tutoring sessions. A "curriculum of the home" has been suggested by the American Association of School Administrators (1988). Such a curriculum would include high expectations, an emphasis on achievement, role modeling, providing a place for study, establishing and practicing structured routines, monitoring television, limiting after-school jobs, and discussing school events.

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) project trains parents of children to age three to be effective teachers of their own children. This project, initiated by the Missouri State Board of Education in 1981, demonstrates the value of early, high-quality parent education. Independent evaluation of the project using posttests of children's abilities and assessments of parents' knowledge and perceptions yielded the following positive results:

- Children in the project scored significantly higher on all measures of intelligence, achievement, auditory comprehension, verbal ability, and language ability.
- Children in the project demonstrated significantly more aspects of positive social development than did comparison children.
- Parents were more knowledgeable about child-rearing practices and child development than were comparison parents.
- Traditional characteristics of "risk" (parents' age and education, income, single-parent families) were not related to children's development at age three.
- Participation positively influenced parents' perceptions of school districts.
- Parents had positive feelings about the program's usefulness.

These positive results prompted the passage of a Missouri bill and subsequent funding for all school districts in Missouri to offer the PAT program.

In a home-based language stimulation program for disadvantaged five-year-olds and their parents from low-income, predominantly African-American, single-parent families (DeBaryshe 1992), educators shared techniques with parents which resulted in greater language use during reading with children at home. Parents participating in a volunteer at-home reading program with their kindergarten children (Floyd 1992) attended a twelve-week program for the purpose of learning whole-language techniques to use at home and learning to judge critically the quality of children's literature books for instructional use. Parents filled out weekly questionnaires on each of the books used in the program. These were returned at an eighty-five percent response rate, indicating a very high level of at-home participation in the program. In a similar program, Ullery (1992) worked to provide kindergarten students from low socioeconomic families with successful home literacy experiences in preparation for early school success. Analysis of the data collected over an eight-week period indicated that parents increased their frequency of reading aloud to their children, increased the frequency of adult modeling of good reading behaviors, and increased their awareness of the importance of reading aloud.

Family Literacy and Adult Education Programs

Research with all populations suggests the strong need for parental involvement in young children's literacy activities (Delgado-Gaitan 1990; Edwards 1995; Koskinen et al. 1995; McKee and Rhett 1995; Morrow 1995; Pierce and McWilliam 1994). Researchers have long been interested in studying the effects of parent involvement and home environment on children's early literacy development (Baker, Sonnenschein, Serpell, Ferenandez-Fein, and Sher 1994; Beales and De-Temple 1993; Elridge-Hunter 1992; Marvin & Mirenda 1993; Roskos and Neuman 1993; Smith and Rotman 1993). The powerful influence of the family on children's literacy development has gained national attention in recent years as evidenced by the many pieces of federal legislation that presently support the family literacy movement (Nickse 1993). Parent involvement in the emergent literacy of their children is being emphasized in a variety of programs (Anziano 1991; Edwards 1995; McKee and Rhett 1995; Morrow 1995; Reading is Fundamental 1994).

Programs emphasizing family literacy and adult education are numerous. "Families about Success," a project sponsored by the Joliet Junior College's Center for Adult Basic Education and Literacy (Irby 1992), focused on adult education/basic skills, children's basic literacy skills, parent-child interaction, career/vocation and self-esteem, and parenting skills. The program enrolled low-income parents and their children, aged three to ten, who had been identified as being at risk of academic failure. In addition to the literacy gains made by the adults in the program, the kindergarten skills screening tests of the preschool children enrolled in the program showed an almost one hundred percent improvement in gross motor, fine motor, and language/cognitive skills. The older children enrolled in the program showed an increase in reading skills by as much as one and a half grade levels. The Even Start program was first funded in 1989. It combines early childhood education with parenting education and adult literacy education. Program evaluations have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of the program in helping parents become full partners in the education of their children (Fore 1991).

Difficulties in reaching all parents. From research we have learned that programs to involve parents have important positive effects on parents' abilities to help their children on school tasks, on improving students' attitudes about school and homework, and on students' achievement (Becker and Epstein

1982; Epstein 1982, 1986, 1991b; Epstein and Dauber 1991). In spite of this strong and growing body of evidence demonstrating important linkages between the home and the school, many schools still have not worked to build strong comprehensive parent involvement programs.

Although research conducted over the past decade has demonstrated that parental involvement has positive effects on students, parents, and teachers, fewer studies have dealt directly with the problems schools face in reaching parents who either cannot or will not become involved in their children's education. For the most part, studies that examine family environments show that, in general, families with higher socioeconomic status and education are more involved in their children's education (Baker and Stevenson 1986; Coleman 1987; Entwisle, Alexander, Cadigan, and Pallas 1986; Lareau 1987; Stevenson and Baker 1987; Useem 1990). In Epstein's review of research in the area of school and family partnerships (1992, 1141), she states:

> A recurring theme in many of these studies is that less educated or poor parents cannot or do not want to become involved in their children's education. Yet, the results of many of these studies also indicate that parents' practices of involvement compensate for less education or less income to benefit children.

A number of researchers have challenged the assumption about less-educated or poor parents. Research by Clark (1983), Comer (1980), Rich, Van Dien, and Mattox (1979), and Scott-Jones (1987) has shown that some teachers successfully involve parents of even the most-disadvantaged students by providing information and assistance in home-learning activities to all parents, regardless of family background and education. Furthermore, teachers who do not frequently involve parents made more stereotypic judgments about the involvement and abilities of less-educated parents, socioeconomically disadvantaged parents, and single parents (Epstein 1991).

"Hard-to-Reach" Families

"Hard-to-reach" families have been the target of research in several studies conducted by Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University (Epstein and Scott-Jones 1993; Epstein 1990; Epstein and Dauber 1991; Epstein 1988). As stated by Epstein (1992), "The hard-to-reach include those whose physical, social, or psychological distance from the school place extra barriers in the school's or family's path, and make communication and interaction even more difficult than usual" (1145). Families described as hard-to-reach include single parents, parents who are less educated, language-minority parents, parents with low incomes, the homeless, and parents with personal problems such as alcoholism, drug use, or mental illness. Parents whose age differs significantly from the norm, such as very young parents—especially adolescent parents—as well as older parents, may also be more difficult to involve. Additionally, families who are new to the community and those of students who are bused great distances may also fall into this hard-to-reach category.

Although more-educated parents report that their children spend more time on homework, less-educated parents consistently report that they could help more if the teachers would tell them how. Research results suggest that children from these families " . . . face disadvantages in school that may be exacerbated by teachers' lack of leadership in organizing parent involvement in learning activities at home" (Epstein 1990, 108). In a study of parents' attitudes towards schools and teachers and their reactions to teachers' programs and practices, Epstein (1986) found that parents' education was not significantly correlated with parent involvement unless teacher practices were considered. Where teachers were leaders in parental involvement, parents at all educational levels were frequently involved in learning activities at home. In a more recent study (Epstein 1993), results indicated that parents who believe that teachers and schools are trying to involve them in their children's education are more involved at school and at home. Conversely, parents who believe that school practices do not foster parental involvement are less likely to be involved at either the home or the school. Thus, teachers' and schools' practices in parent involvement make a difference in whether parents play an active role in their children's education.

Positive attitudes towards parent involvement are significantly correlated with more success in working with hard-to-reach parents. Teachers with more positive attitudes hold regular conferences with all students' parents, communicate with parents about school programs, and provide parents with both good and bad reports of students' progress (Epstein and Dauber 1991). Negative expectations of a parent's and/or child's ability to succeed results in selected use of parent involvement by some teachers. Several researchers have questioned whether teachers are biased against children from one-parent homes (Barton 1981; Boyd and Parrish 1985; Hammond 1979); Epstein (1990) concludes, however, that little bias exists. She does report ". . . when they do occur, biased reports are more likely by teachers who have less contact with parents" (111). Similarly, when teachers and parents differ culturally and educationally, teachers are less likely to know the parents and are more likely to report that the parents are disinterested or uninvolved. Teachers, therefore, make fewer attempts to contact, inform, and work with parents—especially those hard-to-reach ones. Additionally, teachers who see themselves as *different* from the principal, other teachers, and parents are associated with weaker parent involvement programs. These teachers tend to make fewer contacts with parents and to conduct fewer types of activities to involve families, and they are more likely to be affected by disadvantaged characteristics of the student population (Epstein 1991). Teachers who believe they share similar beliefs with parents about being involved in their children's education offer more types of activities designed to involve all families and make more contacts with parents believed by other teachers to be hard-to-reach (Epstein and Dauber 1991).

Parent Involvement in the Middle School

This is particularly true for middle schools. Research findings present a very clear picture of the sharp decline in parental involvement after the elementary grades. Teachers' practices to inform parents and to involve them in the education of their children dramatically decrease. As a result, middle-school teachers communicate less frequently with parents than do elementary-school teachers. Not surprisingly, parents of middle grade students report receiving less information or guidance from the school—during a time when they most need assistance (Useem 1990). As stated by Epstein (1989 3–4):

> Many parents begin to lose touch with their children's schools, do not understand middle school and high school programs, or teachers' expectations and requirements for their children. Many parents begin to lose touch with their children when they do not understand early and later adolescent development, or the learning, social, and personal problems their children face, or how to maintain home conditions that support learning in appropriate forms across the grades. This may be an especially important problem for parents of inner-city youngsters, because continued, knowledgeable parental guidance and understanding is crucial for children who face a host of competing problems in their communities.

Stronger family involvement programs are also seen less frequently in semi-departmentalized or departmentalized classrooms where teachers have many more students to teach than in self-contained classrooms where teachers have fewer students and tend to make more frequent and diverse contacts with parents (Epstein 1991). And teachers of academic subjects other than English and reading use fewer parent involvement strategies than do English and reading teachers (Epstein 1991).

When districts and schools go beyond simple information exchange to create partnerships to promote education reform, great strides can be made. Rutherford and Billig (1995) synthesized findings across nine sites in eight states to identify "lessons" that "enrich our understanding of the critical and complex nature of school/family partnerships in the middle grades" (65). These include: (1) student involvement in community activities and leadership programs, (2) one-on-one communication between families and teachers, (3) involvement of families and students in curricular decisions and school conferences about coursework and individual progress, (4) active advocacy for family and community involvement by school and district leaders, (5) additional resource personnel to address family issues, (6) professional development and social/emotional support for teachers and other school personnel working directly with families, (7) engaging families in meaningful home-learning tasks, (8) use of a variety of strategies to communicate with the community,

(9) opportunities for the community to participate in school activities, and (10) creation of programs based on the strengths and needs of the communities. While each school faces unique challenges, serious consideration of these "lessons" will result in stronger school/family partnerships in the middle grades.

With respect to involving all families, research findings to date indicate the necessity for teachers and parents to come to know one another and to develop shared goals and beliefs about the role each plays in the education of children. Teachers need to assist all parents in working with their children at home to increase success in school. Although schools cannot eradicate the serious social and economic problems that many families face, they can play an important role in the lives of children and parents from these traditionally disadvantaged or hard-to-reach families.

Types of parent involvement found in schools. Williams and Chavkin (1989) identify seven essential characteristics of strong parent involvement programs: (1) written policy, (2) administrative support, (3) training, (4) partnership approach, (5) two-way communication, (6) networking, and (7) evaluation. These seven elements, when fully operational within a school, have the potential for supplying parents and school staff with a "wider range of relevant opportunities for supporting student learning at home and at school" (20). As Williams and Chavkin assert: "As a result, parents can be seen, valued, respected, and held as responsible as school staff for the educational success of all children" (20). According to Williams and Chavkin, having written policies serves to "legitimize" the parent involvement program and help both the educational staff and the parents better understand the role that parents will play in the educational process. Furthermore, the existence of written policies gives administrators and teachers alike the "leverage" they may need to ensure that parent involvement is central to the school program. Administrative support for parent involvement is essential. Support can come in a variety of ways, including funding, availability of necessary program materials, equipment, supplies, and meeting space, as well as the designation of specific individuals who will carry out program tasks. Training that occurs over time and focuses on developing partnership skills should, according to Williams and Chavkin, be available for the school staff, as well as for parents. Training would assist the school staff and parents in developing and maintaining a partnership approach—another essential element. This approach involves activities such as joint planning, goal setting, and program assessment—all made possible by frequent, *comfortable*, two-way communication between school and home. The sixth essential element, ***networking***, refers to the willingness of the school staff to share program information and ideas with individuals representing other parent involvement programs. Finally, programs regarded as "strong" engaged in regular, ongoing evaluation. A continuous cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation served to ensure the existance of a high-quality program, since activities were revised as needed. These seven characteristics reflect not only a school level commitment to parent involvement but a district level commitment as well. As school leaders evaluate their own district's movement toward building strong parent involvement programs, these seven essential elements should prove helpful in pinpointing some possible areas of need and potential starting places.

Epstein (1987) identifies five major types of involvement in schools where strong comprehensive programs for parent involvement exist for all families. These include: (1) basic obligations of families, (2) basic obligations of schools, (3) involvement at school, (4) involvement in learning activities at home, and (5) involvement in decision making. According to Epstein (1991), these five areas do overlap; however, most practices that are used by schools to involve families fall under one of these five types.

Basic obligations of families include the building of important positive home conditions that support learning and behavior. Such conditions might include, but are certainly not limited to, providing for children's basic health and safety needs. Feeding children, clothing them with clean garments, seeing that they have the necessary immunizations, and ensuring that they are registered for and attending school are but a few of the many ways that parents assume basic obligations for their children.

Basic obligations of schools include the many and varied forms of communication that schools create to inform parents about school programs and children's progress. Newsletters, telephone calls, report cards, and parent-teacher conferences represent a few of the ways that schools attempt to fulfill this obligation.

The third type of involvement, *involvement at school*, refers to parent and community volunteers who assist in classrooms or in other areas of the school. Involvement at school could also include such activities as contributing information or materials, sharing skills/interests, and contributing in areas of curriculum development. In Epstein's research, parents and other adults who came to school to serve as members of the audience for school programs, sporting events, or other activities were included in this type of school involvement. Schools with comprehensive parent involvement programs worked to improve and vary schedules of these events so that more families could attend.

Involvement in learning activities at home is the fourth type of parent involvement identified in Epstein's research. Included in this type of involvement are requests and guidance from teachers for parents to ". . . assist their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with the children's class work" (291). Researchers have found that parents are interested not only in what happens to their children while at school; they also want to know what they can do to help their children both at home and school (Anthony and Pollack 1985; Quinton and Rutter 1988; Read, Gardner, and Mahler 1987). Recognizing that most parents can benefit from directions and ideas for home learning activities, teachers in schools with comprehensive parent involvement programs design or select daily or weekly activities for parents and their children at home. In addition, teachers not only provide information about skills required at each grade level but also about how to monitor, discuss, and help with homework. Workshops are designed to help parents learn how to help their children in math, reading, and other academic subjects. These workshops help parents feel confident that they can contribute to their children's education.

The fifth type of involvement, *involvement in decision making*, is seen in schools where parents and other community members take an active role in parent-teacher organizations, advisory councils, Title One programs, or other local committees or groups. Parents and members of the community voice their opinions and work to make the school an important and viable part of the community. Schools assist this type of involvement by providing leadership training for parents and members of the community, by providing information needed by these groups, and by actively supporting the role that these groups play in school improvement activities.

Involving parents in schoolwork. Based on research that links teachers' practices of involving families with more success for students, Epstein and her colleagues at the Johns Hopkins University Center on Families, Communities, School and Children's Learning have developed a program called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork, or TIPS (Epstein 1992b). This program has two components: one that increases parent involvement *at home* and one that increases parent involvement *at school*. The first component is a process for developing ". . . homework assignments that require students to talk to someone at home about something interesting that they are learning in class" (1). Students are to first share their work, ideas, and progress with their families; then their families are to comment, in writing, on what was shared. These comments are recorded on home-to-school communications forms that are returned to the teacher. The second TIPS process is designed to help schools establish a teacher-volunteer partnership to enrich the social studies curriculum for all students. Through this process, parents and other community members are brought into the school building on a regular schedule.

Surveys of teachers, principals, parents, and students conducted by the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University yielded information involving parents in the education of their children (Epstein 1984b). With respect to the relationship between parental activity at school and teachers' uses of parent involvement in learning activities at home, Epstein concluded: "The findings should encourage districts to consider policies that would help classroom teachers develop workable programs of parent involvement in home-learning activities" (72). Although benefits were found for involving parents at school, the effects were modest when compared to those found for at-home types of involvement. Important effects were noted on parents' ideas and knowledge about helping their children and on parents' evaluations of teachers' merits. As stated by Epstein: "Other types of parent involvement and other variables in our model do not have the same strong effects on parents' attitudes and evaluations" (72).

Categories of parent and community involvement. In similar work, four categories of parent and community involvement have been identified by the Home and School Institute, Inc., in Washington, D.C. These four categories are home-school communication, parent education, public relations, and volunteerism. *Home-school communication* includes both one-way and two-way communication strategies, such as newsletters, informal notes, report cards, telephone calls, and conferences. Strengthening partnerships by establishing frequent, open, two-way communications between home and school is emphasized through this component. *Parent education,* the second component, includes any assistance provided by the school that enables families to better meet the developmental and educational needs of their children. Parent workshops, home visits, written materials, parent libraries, and educational video tapes—all serve to help parents help their children. The third component, *public relations,* recognizes that much of the voting public no longer has children enrolled in our nation's schools. Fostering good public relations through consistent, positive contact with the school and its programs is the primary goal of this component. Finally, the fourth component as stated by the Home School Institute is *volunteerism.* Activities in this component are designed to strengthen relations by reaching out to parents and community members to enlist their active support for the students, teachers, and administrators—and even the parents themselves. Parent and community volunteers can support the school by performing tasks in the school building—or in the home or the workplace. Schools approaching parent involvement from this approach have formally addressed and integrated each category into the total school program (Rich and Jones 1977). Schools frequently develop action plans to assist in the planning and implementation of each component (Dulaney 1987).

Parental Roles in Family-School Partnerships

Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1989) describe roles that parents assume in schools where strong partnerships exist between home and school. The roles are (1) parents as partners, (2) parents as collaborators or problem-solvers, (3) parents as audience, (4) parents as supporters, and (5) parents as advisors and/or co–decision makers. The first role, *parents as partners*, as described by these authors recognizes the contributions that parents make in performing basic obligations for their children's education and development. Activities discussed as part of this role include what those parents do to maintain the health and safety of their children, activities necessary for children to grow, develop, and learn. The second role, *parents as collaborators or problem solvers*, include activities undertaken by parents that have a direct impact on their children's academic learning and serve to reinforce the school's efforts: helping with homework, reading to children, taking children to the library, and exposing children to a variety of experiences. This role also includes parents' efforts in cooperating with the school to solve problems related to a child's learning or behavior. Parents perform the role of *audience* when they attend school events and activities, including programs, open houses, conferences, sporting events, and so forth. Parents fulfilling the fourth role, *parents as supporters*, volunteer their services to the school in a variety of ways. They may be involved in a wide range of activities including, but certainly not limited to, working with the home-school organization, serving as classroom, school helpers, or tutors, or serving as liaisons for parents who are new to the school or district. The fifth and final role, *parents as advisors and/or co–decision makers*, includes parents' active participation on advisory councils and committees, their attendance at school board meetings, and their willingness to become involved in making decisions affecting the school. As Henderson, Marbarger, and Ooms point out, parents are involved most often in the support role, and least often involved in the decision-making role. These authors recommend that schools assess the ways in which parents are involved and seek greater involvement in roles where their participation is not as great. With respect to the decision-making role, evidence resulting from efforts during the past twenty years to involve parents in advisory councils is disappointing, to say the least. Problems are most often related to the schools' unwillingness to establish meaningful advisory roles for parents and, subsequently, the parents' unwillingness to serve on "paper councils" or to spend time in nonsubstantive roles (McLaughlin and Shields 1987; Melaragno, Lyons, and Sparks 1981; Keesling and Melaragno 1983).

Schools with Strong Home-School Partnerships

Efforts to build strong partnerships are meeting with tremendous success in a variety of schools across the United States. One such example is Boston's David A. Ellis School where teachers, administrators, and parents are cooperating with the Institute for Responsive Education to make families equal partners in their children's education. The establishment of a parent center, a clothing exchange, and a school store succeeds in making a connection between families and schools. Since the project began in 1988, a support group for adults earning their high school equivalency diplomas, classes in English as a second language, parent workshops, and breakfasts organized by grade level for parents to discuss curriculum and other classroom concerns with administrators and teachers have served to draw families into the school on a regular basis (Jennings 1990).

Schools throughout California and Mississippi are involved in the Quality Education Project, launched in 1982 by Nancy Honig, the wife of California's superintendent of public instruction. This program was designed to improve the coordination between the school and home by training school officials, teachers, and parents to work together to improve student learning. Performance contracts are signed by all parties. Parents pledge to provide a quiet place for their children to study, to encourage them to complete their homework, and to spend at least fifteen minutes daily reading with or to them. Parents also agree to get their children in bed by 9 p.m. each night, to get them to school on time, and to attend conferences and other school events. The administrators and teachers promise to provide a safe place for children to learn, to teach all concepts necessary for academic achievement, to strive to be aware of each children's individual needs, and to communicate with parents about their children's progress (Jennings 1990).

In a parent involvement training project developed in 1983 at Cornell University, parents and teachers participate in workshops designed to develop communication skills and strategies for working together to support children's education. The six weekly 2 1/2-hour workshops are based on extensive research with 276 families and their children's teachers conducted by Cornell University professors Moncrieff Cochran, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and William Cross, Jr. This Cooperative Communication between Home and School program has been implemented in dozens of New York school systems. In a recent evaluation of the program by the New York State Education Department, these findings were noted: (1) parents developed more positive attitudes about school involvement; (2) parents felt better about their ability to talk with teachers; (3) parents were more satisfied with what they knew about their child's school; (4) teachers' attitudes about parent involvement changed; (5) teachers' communication skills increased; and (6) administrators and teachers worked together to identify school supports for home-school communication (Cornell Cooperative Extension 1989).

One final model of parent involvement in schools, the Comer method, will be shared. James Comer began his program in 1968 in two elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut. With his colleagues at Yale University, Comer created a governance and management team that included parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff members. This team served to coordinate all of the school's activities. This structural change allowed teachers to work closely with parents—a necessity for effective parent involvement programs. Comer and his colleagues continued to implement the model into other schools, while at the same time creating a social skills curriculum for inner-city children. By 1984 the two original project schools were tied for third and fourth place in their district, with students testing a year above grade level in one school and seven months above grade level in the other. Furthermore, these schools ranked first and second in attendance and did not have any serious problems with student behavior (Comer 1985).

About 150 schools nationwide now use the Comer method, which grew out of his understanding of the critical importance of recognizing the interactions between family and child and between child and teacher. To what does Comer attribute the success of this model? Recognizing the importance of improving curriculum and instructional practices, he still maintains that schools can be truly reformed only if we address the larger factors that affect student learning.

SUMMARY

The research findings to date are unequivocal. Involving parents in the education of their children results in increased student performance at all grade levels, regardless of educational background or social class. Further, both children and parents develop more positive attitudes about school. From research we have learned that parents can have a very positive impact on the education of their children and that teachers who make frequent attempts to involve all parents are regarded by parents and principals as "good teachers." We have also learned that teachers who are leaders in the use of parent involvement strategies are more likely to reach parents regarded by other teachers as "hard-to-reach."

Effective family involvement programs open the lines of communication between home and school, support parents in their attempts to help their children in home-learning activities, and recognize the importance of building strong partnerships. While home-school partnerships cannot eliminate the many stresses and demands faced by both families and school personnel, working together can reduce conflict and increase the probability that learning will occur for all children.

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Chapter 2

Barriers to Involvement

A note from Elizabeth . . .
I needed a signature on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and had not been able to get the parent to come in for a conference. We had made a number of telephone calls and appointments—all without results. One day the little girl was waiting after school for her mother to pick her up. I told the child to wait in my office and that I would go to the car and ask the mother to come in for a conference. The special education teacher was called, and we waited for the mother. The mother pulled up, and when I went out to get her she was very angry that the child was not there. She explained that her boss would not let her leave, so she only had time on her break to pick up the child and take her to work with her. The little girl had to wait in the lobby until the mother got off work. The woman was obviously afraid that she would be in trouble with her boss, so I immediately let the child go. On the way back into the school building I thought of all of the barriers present in this situation that prevented the mother from being involved in her child's education. This woman was not an irresponsible parent, or even one that did not care. She simply had a more pressing problem—one of putting something to eat on the family's table.

In the previous chapter we discussed the positive effects that a strong parent involvement component can have on the performance of children in school. Yet, do we really take this powerful research seriously? Are we *really* convinced that this investment of time, energy, and money will yield results as great as those indicated in the research literature? A look at the policies and programs that currently exist in most schools would lead us to think not. It is a rare school that does more than go through the motions of involving parents in the instruction of their children. To be sure, there are the traditional, almost ceremonial programs and events that get parents into school once or twice yearly: the open houses and the parent-teacher conferences. There may even be a parent-teacher organization; however, involvement directed toward helping adults become better partners in their children's education is not very common.

As Epstein (1982) points out: "It is questionable whether the familiar rituals of visit-school night and parent conferences accomplish more than a polite exchange between parents and teachers" (113). Yet, in many schools, the most we ask of parents is that they show their child that learning is important by being informed of what is going on at school, by attending events in which their child is participating, or by putting pressure on their child when more effort in schoolwork is needed. While these activities yield some benefits and may represent an initial step toward increased involvement, research indicates that parents who are given strategies to use at home and who are provided with home-learning activities to work with their children make the greatest contributions to their children's learning.

Despite strong research evidence of the positive effects parent involvement can have on students' achievement, attitudes about school, and behavior, why is it that so many schools have yet to involve parents in the education of their children in ways proved by research to be most effective? What barriers exist that prevent schools and parents from forming strong partnerships?

Barriers to Effecting Strong Family Involvement

The first step in building strong and effective partnerships involves identification of the barriers that play a significant role in the school and in the homes of the families that make up the school population or clientele. This is no simple task; the reasons—or barriers—why most schools have not developed strong partnerships are many and varied. Most reasons, or barriers, can be divided into two main groups: barriers erected by schools and barriers erected by families. We'll talk first about the barriers erected by schools, the ones most changeable within the jurisdiction of school personnel.

Barriers Erected by Schools

In a recent graduate course in parent and community involvement, a group of seventy-five teachers were asked to list reasons why teachers were reluctant to involve parents in the education of their children. Reasons cited were: (1) it takes too much extra time, (2) parents may take over the classroom, (3) parents may not agree with the teachers' teaching methods, (4) teachers feel intimidated by parents, (5) teachers don't know the parents' expectations, (6) teachers don't know how to effectively involve parents, (7) teachers are afraid parents will scrutinize the program, (8) teachers lack confidence, (9) teachers don't want their authority undermined, (10) parents may have unrealistic perceptions of students' abilities, (11) teachers don't want to give up power, control, or authority, (12) lack of support by the administration, (13) lack of classroom space for having parents work in the classroom, (14) requires too much organization, (15) teachers are unwilling to admit that they could use help, (16) teachers don't want to deal with parents, (17) teachers lack communication skills to work with parents, and (18) teachers don't want to change the system they have set up.

Lack of knowledge/skill in parent involvement. The reasons cited above are not at all unique to this particular group of teachers. They are, in fact, rather common reasons or excuses for not increasing the level of parent involvement in a school, classroom, or program. Several teachers mentioned lack of knowledge or skill in working with parents as a major barrier to increasing parental involvement. This represents one of the most common barriers to the establishment of a strong home-school partnership. Lack of preservice and/or in-service training in the area of family and community involvement accounts for many misconceptions about the role of both parents and educators. Additionally, lack of communication skills often results in many misunderstandings that might have been avoided. Many times teachers speak in "educationese," using words such as *phonetic* or *math manipulatives* or acronyms such as SRA and IEP. While this language is part of the everyday language of educators, it is often not understood by parents and serves to reinforce age-old barriers that send the erroneous message: *Parents are not teachers.*

Teacher Preservice Education

This serious barrier of lack of knowledge and skill in working with parents is one that some states have begun to address by requiring a college or university course in parent and community involvement prior to granting teacher certification. In the state of Illinois, for example, early childhood teachers must take such a course. However, certification as a regular elementary education teacher in kindergarten through grade nine does not require a course in parent and community involvement. As a result, new teachers do not understand the benefits of a strong home/school partnership, do not develop critical communication skills, and do not learn strategies for involving parents in their children's education. According to Katie Klumpp, director of special projects, PTA Project HOPE, "Many schools do not include any reference to parent involvement in their entire teacher preparation, not the philosophy, nor the research information, nor the skills in how to make parent involvement happen" (6).

This lack of attention to parent involvement during teacher training is, according to Stallworth and Williams (1981), directly related to teachers' infrequent use of parent involvement strategies. Similarly, Epstein (1985) asserts: "Currently, for many teachers, training results in attitudes and practices designed to keep parents out of the learning process and even out of the classroom" (23).

In a 1980 survey devoted to teacher training and parent involvement in education conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 86.6 percent of the teachers and 92.2 percent of the principals agreed that training for working with parents was needed. In addition, from the over four thousand educators providing written responses to this survey, over seventy percent of the teachers and over eighty percent of the principals agreed that a required course was needed. In a similar survey, Williams and Chavkin (1985) found that very little undergraduate training in parent involvement was available to prospective elementary teachers. Of the 575 teacher educators responding to the survey, only four percent indicated the existence of a complete course in parent involvement, only fifteen percent reported devoting a portion of a course to this topic, and only thirty-seven percent reported having even one class period devoted to parent involvement. These research findings are clear regarding teacher training in parent involvement; however, without required courses during teacher education, in-service programs must shoulder a large responsibility.

In-Service Education

There are many issues surrounding in-service education. As stated by Chavkin and Williams: "In-service issues include planning and development of training, where and when such training should occur, rewards and incentives for participating in training, funding sources, and the voluntary and mandatory requisites of training" (88). These are issues not to be taken lightly, and they are issues that pose serious barriers to the development of parent involvement programs in many school districts.

Vast gaps exist between what research indicates are effective practices in parental involvement and what teachers and schools currently do. In-service opportunities in parent involvement are critical to developing partnerships with families. Teachers need to view their role as one of managing many types of resources—including parent involvement—in order to help all students succeed to the best of their abilities (Epstein and Becker 1982). Unfortunately, many in-service programs in the area of parent involvement focus exclusively on communicating with parents. While communication is important, this is a limited view of parent involvement—involvement that should also include sharing strategies for helping parents become better teachers of their own children. Also, as is true of many in-service programs, there is a lack of follow-up and accountability associated with application of the ideas and strategies presented.

A note from Elizabeth . . .
One of the most valuable activities I can undertake to promote classroom change is to attend a workshop with my staff. When a speaker exudes an enthusiasm that just cannot be denied—we are almost always spurred to action! As we participate in the workshop experience, I am there to offer encouragement, ideas, and resources for implementation in our classrooms. The efforts that teachers make in implementing new ideas in their classrooms need to be documented. We do this by making notes during the

formative phase of their teacher evaluation. There must always be a connection between staff development and teacher evaluation. The connection serves to make both parties accountable.

Many times the most effective staff development offerings are those led by the principal in the school building. Principals who review what research has to say about parent involvement, or who attend in-service sessions themselves, are much more likely to have an impact on teachers' adoption of the material presented. At Oakwood, monthly coffees serve as a vehicle for these school-based in-service opportunities. Teachers are empowered to develop their own strategies for implementing the ideas presented, and they know they will be held accountable for doing so. Positive feedback from the principal as teachers begin to implement new strategies is critical. Then, as they become aware that the strategies are working—and that what they are doing in terms of parent involvement is making a difference—they assume greater responsibility for continuing their own in-service activities by attending workshops, reading, and sharing ideas related to parent involvement with other teachers. The key is for the teachers to become convinced that parent involvement is good for the children and that the strategies used must be a natural outgrowth of the curriculum.

District Policies for Involving Families

Policies that support the involvement of all families in the education of their children are needed in every school system. McLaughlin and Shields (1987) cite several reasons why family involvement merits policy attention. First, strong evidence exists that parents of all income and educational levels *want* to be involved. Second, demographic data indicating "differential changes in the birthrates of minority and majority populations and changes in family patterns, immigration trends, and wage structures . . . show the need for policy makers to attend to a public school clientele that is predominantly outside the mainstream" (157). Such policies must reflect a commitment to building strong relationships with *all* families and be accompanied by action plans with clear goals and objectives for building and maintaining a comprehensive program for parental involvement.

Teacher attitudes about parents. Several reasons cited by teachers for not involving families relate to attitudes teachers hold about parents. According to a survey of 3698 classroom teachers (Becker and Epstein 1982), although almost three-quarters of the teachers agreed that family involvement is a good idea, about half the teachers had serious doubts about the success of practical efforts to involve families in learning activities at home. Written comments of the teachers surveyed reinforced common stereotypes of parents who were labeled as "pushy" upper-middle-class parents, "helpful" middle-class parents, and "incapable" lower-class parents. Not surprisingly, teachers who did not report using family involvement strategies were more apt to say that the families would not be able or willing to carry out activities related to child's schoolwork at home. This attitudinal barrier is common, particularly among teachers who differ culturally and educationally from their students (Epstein and Dauber 1991). Such teachers are most likely to perceive that "disadvantaged" or less-educated parents either cannot or do not want to become involved. This presents a barrier that is counterproductive to developing partnerships with what have been termed hard-to-reach families, despite research showing that, when teachers provide assistance, parents of all backgrounds can be productively involved in the education of their children (Dauber and Epstein 1989; Epstein 1986).

Most of the teachers surveyed by Epstein and Dauber (1989) said that they were stronger supporters of parent involvement than were the parents; however, surveys of those parents were contradictory. This is not uncommon. In several studies researchers have found that teachers and parents disagree in their ideas of whether parents are involved or want to be involved (Dornbusch and Ritter 1988; Epstein and Dauber 1991; Leitch and Tangri 1988). In addition, teachers at all grade levels tend to blame parents for their low level of involvement (Davies 1988a, 1988b; Epstein and Dauber 1991; Leitch and Tangri 1988). Yet other teachers—even in the same school building—successfully involve similar parents in their children's education. Teachers who perceive that parents are not interested in being involved are less likely to extend invitations to those families and are more apt to believe that one of the major barriers to parent involvement is apathy on the part of the parents. A frequently heard comment among teachers following parent-teacher conferences is, "The ones who really need to be here didn't come. They just don't care."

Factors Affecting Single-Parent and Working-Parent Families

Oftentimes, the parents to whom the teachers are referring fall into those "hard-to-reach" categories because of job schedules, family structures, language differences, or other difficulties. In the Working Parent Project, conducted between 1981 and 1983 with funding by the National Institute of Education, factors affecting the ability of single-parent families and families with both parents working outside of the home to be involved in the day-to-day education of their children were studied. Inflexible leave policies negatively affected parents' ability to monitor their children's school progress and to respond to communications and concerns from teachers and other school officials. In single-parent families, barriers to involvement were also due to other factors. Less than half the single mothers reported having access to another adult for assistance with school- and education-related activities. When compared with dual-earner counterparts in the study, single parents' reduced income levels also prevented their ability to take advantage of such typical avenues of relief as babysitters, fast food, reliable transportation, and adequate recreation for themselves and their children. These hindrances placed further barriers between the home and school. It is important to note that all of the sisty families interviewed in this study expressed an interest in being more involved in their children's education. Many also expressed regret at not being able to attend special school events such as school plays and field trips. Espinoza (1988), in discussing the results of this study, states: "Any adjustments that schools and teachers can make to facilitate the involvement and presence of working parents in schools will result in greater cooperation, mutual support, and understanding that strengthens the home-school connections" (65).

In another study of single parents, Epstein (1985) found that single parents spend more time helping their child at home than did married parents; however, married parents spent more time helping at school. As far as interest and willingness to help with home-learning activities, no differences were noted between single and married parents. The important differences, as discovered by Epstein, were in the views and actions of the teachers toward single and married parents. Teachers who were described as *leaders* in parent involvement made equal demands on both groups of parents; however, teachers who were not described as *leaders* made more demands on single parents and rated single parents as ". . . less helpful and less responsible on learning activities at home" (21).

Families from Diverse Populations

Oftentimes, the parents that teachers say aren't interested in being more involved are those parents from a culture or ethnic group different from that of the teachers. In her article "Restructuring Schools for Equity: What We Have Learned in Two Decades," Banks states: "Implementing an effective parent involvement program is not easy. Parents and teachers live in different worlds that can be divided by psychosocial barriers" (44). During the last decade a number of researchers have initiated studies of how family members of all educational and cultural backgrounds teach their children and work with schools. These include studies of African-American families (Clark 1983; Comer 1980, 1988; McAdoo 1981; Scott-Jones 1987); Chinese-American families (Sung 1987); Hispanic families (Canino, Earley, and Rogler 1989; Delgado and Humm-Delgado 1982; Delgado-Gaitan 1990, 1992; Moll and Greenberg 1992) and others. Researcher Sara Lawrence Lightfoot in her discussion of barriers to parent involvement notes that, despite evidence that African-American parents place a high value on education, many teachers continue to believe that such parents are unconcerned about their children's progress in school. Similarly, in research on how Mexican-American parents convey the value of education to their children, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) concluded that parents provided children with the appropriate emotional support necessary for school learning. Further, "Parents share a great deal with their children in the areas of aspirations, motivations, physical resources, and face-to-face interactions, which organize the total learning environment" (512). Delgado-Gaitan also found that Mexican-American parents tended to use their own lack of educational opportunity and their personal experiences to motivate their children. Finally, the concept of a well-educated person in the Mexican-American community was broader than being able to complete a school program. "A child that was *buen educado* (well-educated) not only attended school but was also respectful and cooperative with those around him or her" (512). Findings from studies such as the ones conducted by these researchers need to be available to teachers who are expected to work with an increasingly diverse student body and their families.

In a position paper written by Katie Klumpp, director of special projects for PTA Project HOPE, "Barriers to Successful Outreach to Parents of Diverse Populations" (1990), the number-one barrier is cited as "racism, and behavior which is not intentionally racist but has a racist effect" (1). Included in the discussion of this barrier are other common types of discrimination based on differences in sex, social class, education, marital status, and language. Although many would like to think that these types of discrimination do not exist in our schools, if we knowingly or unknowingly think about or behave toward another person in ways that are negative, indifferent, or stereotypical *because of that person's racial/ethnic group identification, sex, income level, marital status, education, or language*, we are guilty of discriminatory behavior. As stated in the Project HOPE position paper (1):

> In terms of outreach to parents, it is immoral to campaign to bring in people who may not be treated with respect and understanding after they get here. It is the responsibility of the school and the parent groups to take any steps needed to make sure that all interaction with parents is conducted in an atmosphere of warm acceptance and mutual respect.

Diversity in our parent population is also present in different family configurations and ways of life. It has been estimated that only seven percent of today's school children come from families that were considered typical in 1965: two-parent families with a single wage earner (McLaughlin and Shields 1987). Single parents, two working parents, blended families, parents sharing custody, parents who work at night, homeless parents, military parents, and so on all have needs that many schools do not take into account when they attempt to interact with and involve parents. School-based strategies scheduled for the convenience of school personnel have tended to engage the participation of some parents yet have failed to reach large numbers of parents—particularly those from low-income families (McLaughlin and Shields 1987). As stated earlier with respect to preservice and in-service training, teachers must receive ongoing assistance in parental involvement, and these opportunities must include training in developing the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed in order to interact successfully with all families.

Comments from some teachers suggest a fear that parents will react in inappropriate or even negative ways if they come to know more about the classroom and the curriculum and methods employed.

However, according to Becker and Epstein (1982), most of the teachers surveyed agreed that if parents spend time at school "they usually make a greater effort to help their children learn at home" (101). In addition, teachers reported that having parents observe a teacher's methods for presenting material, responding to students' questions, and analyzing mistakes may help parents be more effective in working with their own children. Another benefit to having parents active at school has been identified by Epstein (1985): "Teachers who had at least a few active parents at school tended to feel more comfortable about asking other parents to help with learning activities at home" (22) and ". . . teachers who conducted several workshops for parents at school over the school year more frequently requested that parents help with learning activities at home" (20).

Lack of time, commitment, and support. Another barrier—that of time to plan, carry out, and evaluate parent involvement practices—impacts negatively on the development of home and school partnerships. Teachers have many heavy demands on their time, and the added burden of preparing workshop materials, directions and/or materials for home-learning activities, and other parent involvement projects is almost overwhelming. Sadly, teachers who say that they "just don't have time" to promote the concept of parents as partners don't realize that this just may be the most effective tool they have to increase student learning. Teacher commitment of time and energy to the organization of substantial exchanges with families increases the teacher's use of family involvement in learning activities at home and has a subsequent positive effect on the amount of time parents and other family members spend with children on at-home learning activities (Epstein 1985, 1986). For teachers to devote the time and energy that family involvement requires, they must have support and resources. Because of the very real time pressures on educators, Epstein (1989) advocates extra support and leadership be given to schools, in addition to support and encouragement from staff leaders and coordinators.

The Impact of the Building Principal

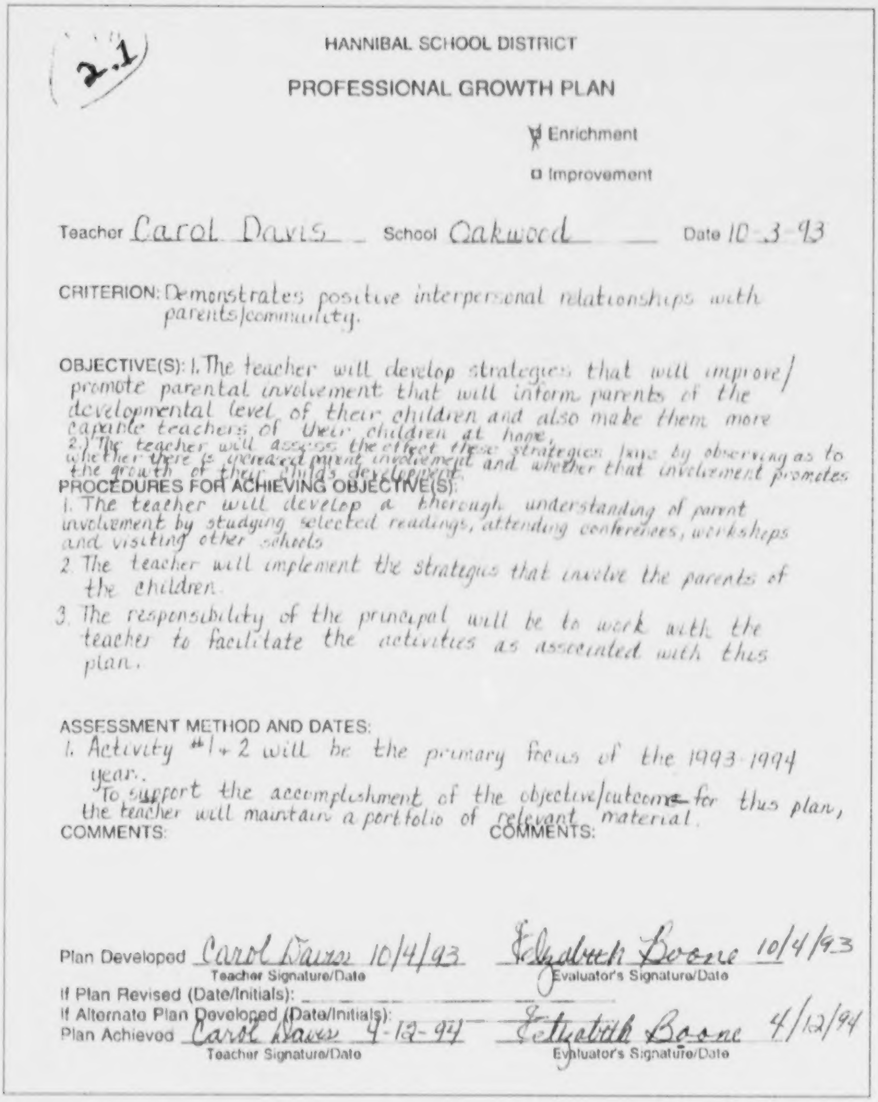
According to research findings reported by the Quality Education Project (1980), a critical factor in predicting the extent of parent involvement occurring in a school is the interest and initiative of the principal. Successful parent involvement programs require the leadership of a knowledgeable and committed building principal. This person holds the key to convincing teachers that parental programs can be designed so that they actually help teachers meet the educational goals they have set for their students. Also, the building principal is most likely to have the most in-depth knowledge about the families in the school, particularly when families have more than one child attending over a period of several years. When the principal not only *encourages* but also *expects* teachers, families, and children to participate actively as partners in the educational process, parental involvement becomes the norm rather than the exception.

There's no way to skirt the issue of time. *Family involvement does take time.* The challenge educators face is to find ways to devote the time that is necessary for building solid, lasting partnerships with all families. A further challenge for building principals is to find ways to reward teachers' efforts in family involvement. Rarely is family involvement included as a criterion for teacher evaluation. Yet, including family involvement in the evaluation process of teachers is an excellent way administrators can show their support in this area. Knowing that the principal is actively looking for evidence that parents are being involved is the impetus some teachers need for improving their practices in this area—and that other teachers need for sharing with others the successes they have found.

A note from Elizabeth . . .

When you think about your curriculum, there is no part that should not have as a major component the involvement of families. The theme cycles and units that serve to integrate our curriculum include planned opportunities for parents to be involved—as resource persons, audience members, and helpers. Parents are informed as to the literature their child is reading, new math concepts being learned, strategies used in writing—virtually all aspects of the curriculum. As principal, I support this ongoing involvement of families by making available computers and appropriate software and by having a generous policy on using the copier. In addition, I ask for artifacts—concrete examples of the teachers' efforts to involve families—as part of the portfolios teachers submit during their evaluation process.

When family involvement becomes one of the criteria by which teachers are evaluated, the principal must actively support teachers in their efforts. This necessitates active participation of the principal in staff development opportunities, as well as in setting and monitoring goals related to parent involvement. Oakwood teachers construct an annual Professional Development Plan. Family involvement is reflected on many teachers' plans. In Figure 2.1 is the Professional Growth Plan for Carol Davis, a teacher who team-teaches the first-grade class. In Figure 2.2 is a list of the actual activities implemented by two teachers during the year to meet their goal of increased parent involvement.



2.1

HANNIBAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLAN

☒ Enrichment

☐ Improvement

Teacher Carol Davis School Oakwood Date 10-3-93

CRITERION: Demonstrates positive interpersonal relationships with parents/community.

OBJECTIVE(S): 1. The teacher will develop strategies that will improve/promote parental involvement that will inform parents of the developmental level of their children and also make them more capable teachers of their children at home.
2.) The teacher will assess the effect these strategies have by observing as to whether there is increased parent involvement and whether that involvement promotes the growth of their child's development.

PROCEDURES FOR ACHIEVING OBJECTIVE(S):
1. The teacher will develop a thorough understanding of parent involvement by studying selected readings, attending conferences, workshops and visiting other schools
2. The teacher will implement the strategies that involve the parents of the children.
3. The responsibility of the principal will be to work with the teacher to facilitate the activities as associated with this plan.

ASSESSMENT METHOD AND DATES:
1. Activity #1 + 2 will be the primary focus of the 1993-1994 year.
To support the accomplishment of the objective/outcome for this plan, the teacher will maintain a portfolio of relevant material.

COMMENTS:

COMMENTS:

Plan Developed Carol Davis 10/4/93 Elizabeth Boone 10/4/93
Teacher Signature/Date Evaluator's Signature/Date
If Plan Revised (Date/Initials): ______
If Alternate Plan Developed (Date/Initials):
Plan Achieved Carol Davis 4-12-94 Elizabeth Boone 4/12/94
Teacher Signature/Date Evaluator's Signature/Date

Figure 2.1

Barriers Erected by Homes

Although research indicates that parents *do care* about their children and *do want* to be involved in their children's education, there are some barriers to building strong partnerships which have been erected by the home. The tendency for schools to view barriers as unalterable variables that cannot be addressed by the school is erroneous. Many school staffs have worked successfully to overcome barriers erected both by schools and by homes. These barriers must be attended to in order for schools to truly develop lasting relationships with all families.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Verification for Professional Growth Plan: Carol Davis, Suzanne Gottman

Parent Community Involvement, 1994

1. Parent corner
    a. Developmentally appropriate books
    b. Books/tapes
    c. Parent resource books
    d. Developmentally appropriate games
    e. Parent notebook
    f. Videos, student presentations, available for viewing from 2:45–3:15 on Fridays
2. Parent reading forms sent home weekly with literature books
3. Parent helpers (listening and taping students read throughout the year)
4. Conferences with parents throughout the year
    a. Letters
    b. Phone
    c. School
5. Before school assessment (beginning of the year)
6. Have-a-go sheets (weekly help for spelling)
7. Sent home information about "quality, appropriate literature," including author and text information
8. Parent newsletters
9. Parent notebook
10. Heritage night (parents asked to provide food and materials for displays)
11. Communication bulletin board
12. Weekly behavior forms for classroom discipline plan

Figure 2.2

Negative attitudes toward school. When parents have developed negative associations with and expectations about school, building a bridge from the school to the home is a difficult—but *absolutely necessary*—task. Sometimes parents themselves were not successful in school. They may have struggled with academic tasks, perhaps being labeled "disabled" or "lazy." They may have had behavioral difficulties that resulted in negative reports to their parents and/or alienation from their classmates. Although these events would have taken place many years earlier, to some parents the events may seem as if they happened only yesterday. Just walking through the door of the school elicits negative images and feelings of frustration! It is not difficult to imagine what these parents must be going through when they are asked to visit the school for a conference with a teacher or with the principal. Other parents may have had more recent unpleasant experiences, such as parents of children with special needs who do not understand the school's evaluation and placement procedures for the child, or parents of children who experience chronic behavioral difficulties resulting in frequently negative contacts with the school. Sometimes these negative—and even hostile—attitudes about school affect more than one generation in a family. Grandparents have come into Oakwood School angry because they are convinced that their grandchildren may be hurt the way they were hurt when they were in school many years before.

A note from Elizabeth . . .

Some of our families who have negative attitudes about school also do not have telephones. Oftentimes, the only contact we have with these families occurs when an angry parent comes to school to issue a complaint. This was the case with one family with whom we were meeting about special services for their visually impaired child. The father was so belligerent that, in the middle of the meeting, I stopped and asked what we had done to make him so angry. He responded that he had to be the one "to keep us on the ball." His anger was only serving to keep a working relationship out of reach, when what we needed was a clear view of what his goals were for the child and a conversation about how we could best go about obtaining those goals. It became very clear to me then that the only chance I had for extinguishing this hostility would involve working overtime to establish a personal relationship built on mutual trust and caring.

Schools must work hard to reach these parents for whom the image of school is a negative one. Signs *welcoming* parents as they enter the building, rather than ones that read "Stop! All Visitors Must Report to the Office" might be one place to start to develop a "family-friendly" building. Being sure that families can find their way around the school—and that they can easily locate the school office and their child's classroom—is another way to reduce the stress that families sometimes feel when they enter a school. Speaking to family members in words they can understand and asking for their opinions and ideas as well as their assistance with home-learning activities are other ways to begin to chip away at old barriers and build new bridges between the home and school. Research by Lindle (1989) suggests that a "personal touch" is the most enhancing factor in school relations. Parents like teachers to convey a special interest in their children and to share successes as well as problems in both academic and social areas. In addition, parents mentioned their dissatisfaction with administrators, teachers, and other school personnel who are "too businesslike," "too patronizing," or who "talk down to us" (13).

Time and economic constraints. Lack of time is frequently mentioned by parents as a barrier to greater involvement. It is interesting to note that research does not show that employed parents are necessarily less involved than parents who do not work outside the home (Leitch and Tangri 1988). However, two-wage-earner families and single-parent families both say they would spend more time in educational activities with their children if they could (Epstein 1990; King 1989). Single-parent families and low-income families are further constrained by their lack of dollars for fast food, reliable transportation, and other such "time-savers" that two-wage-earner families use to "buy" time for other activities.

Parents' educational levels and abilities. Many parents and teachers express concern over the ability of parents to help their children with at-home-learning activities. Parents responding to a survey by Epstein (1986) said they could help if they had more education or if their children were in a lower grade. Parents of older elementary children, in particular, state that they do not have enough training to help their children in reading and math at home (Epstein 1986), an inadequacy that was still expressed after parent education was conducted. Subsequently, Epstein found less teacher use of home-learning activities for students in middle grades, and less self-confidence of parents in helping children in these grades. It is important to note that the data also show that when teachers of *any grade level* involve parents frequently in home-learning activities, they can positively affect the parents' awareness of the teachers' efforts and knowledge about the school program. In the classrooms of teachers who were leaders in parent involvement, parents at all educational levels, regardless of their child's grade level, were frequently involved.

The Family System

The barriers that served to separate homes and schools are slowly being replaced by bridges created to link the two. As educators we are called upon to understand the family system as a whole and to work to provide a variety of services within the educational setting. Newer programs are experimenting with "one-stop shopping" where families can receive, right in the school building, a variety of services—medical, dental, counseling, GED classes, and so forth.

Family systems theory focuses on the family, as opposed to the individual child. In order to fully understand the needs of the child, there must be an understanding of the needs of the family. Turnbull and Turnbull (1990) have designed a four-component family systems framework which includes family characteristics, family interaction, family functions, and the family life cycle. The first component, *family characteristics*, includes information about the size and make-up of the family. Knowing how many adults and children are in the home, whether there are step-parents and step-children, and the role of a noncustodial parent is seen as important, as is learning about the family's cultural background, socioeconomic status, and any other personal characteristics of the family which may have an impact, such as a family member with a chronic illness or disability. How family members communicate and work with one another is a major focus of the second and third components, *family interaction* and *family functions*. Finally, the fourth component, *family life cycle*, looks at stages of family life: newly married couples, families with young children, families with school-age children, families with young adults, and families with middle-aged parents.

There is an increasing move toward recognizing the family as a complete unit. "This change requires teachers to be cognizant not only of individual cycles of growth and development, but also the family life cycle" (Deiner 1993, 326). Effective teachers will do all they can to learn about the families of the children in their classrooms and schools. Recognizing and respecting differences that exist in all families will assist teachers and administrators in not only removing barriers but in building bridges to link home and school.

SUMMARY

Administrators, teachers, and other school personnel erect powerful barriers that serve to hinder the creation of strong and effective partnerships with parents and family members. In this chapter we discussed some of the more prevalent barriers, as well as possible reasons they exist. Treatment was also given to the barriers erected by parents and family situations. In the next several chapters we will share many strategies for communicating with families and for involving them in their children's education in ways well-supported by research. Before continuing in your reading, perhaps it would be beneficial for you to consider your own school situation. Answering the questions listed below may provide you with important insights into the barriers that prevent your school from building bridges to each students' home.

For your consideration . . .

1. The family involvement program in your school is supported by teachers.
   Yes/No
2. The in-service provided for staff to review research and develop new strategies has as one of its goals to help teachers help parents be better teachers of their children.
   Yes/No
3. Your parent program employs strategies to involve the working and the hard-to-reach parent.
   Yes/No
4. The principal is an integral part of the family involvement program.
   Yes/No

5. Assessment of the family involvement program is tied to evaluation of teachers.
   Yes/No

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Chapter 3

Sharing Policies and Procedures: Creating an Effective School Handbook

A note from Kathy . . .
When my oldest daughter entered first grade, a school handbook was distributed at an Open House. A letter accompanying the handbook requested parents to familiarize the students with the rules listed in part one of the handbook. Eager to perform the role of a "good" parent, upon returning home that evening my daughter and I sat down together to review the rules. Imagine my surprise when I discovered there were forty-two rules listed in that handbook!

A note from Elizabeth . . .
When I read the handbooks that I had inherited from previous principals at Oakwood School, I was struck at how negative they sounded. They were filled with do's and don'ts: "How to walk in the hall," "what to do if you lose a book." In it was nothing personal of what goes on in the school . . . no welcome to incoming children and parents. The school handbook resembled an army manual more than a booklet that reassured parents their children were in good hands. The school handbook may be the first encounter families have with the school . . . It should have a personal flavor to it. Policy statements are important, but overall, the school handbook should look more like an advertisement for the school and less like an institutional manual.

The research on parent involvement indicates that teachers and parents can create viable partnerships by exchanging information, sharing in decision making, collaborating in the child's learning, and supporting each other in their respective roles (Swick 1991). In the previous two chapters we have shared research relating parent involvement to student achievement and to changes in attitudes and behaviors of students, parents, teachers, and principals. We have also discussed barriers that hinder the creation of strong and effective partnerships. This chapter will include information to assist schools in developing school handbooks containing policies and procedures that provide the foundation for a family-centered school. Central to the development of these policies and procedures is the recognition of various parent and teacher roles and behaviors that make for successful partnerships. Some general policy suggestions and strategies for engaging parents and teachers in supportive and collaborative roles will be included along with guidelines for developing an effective school handbook.

Shared Beliefs about Parent Involvement

Through a partnership arrangement, parents, teachers, and principals can be actively involved in collaborative efforts supporting maximum learning for all children. The concept of partnership is based on the premise that collaborating partners have some "common basis for action and a sense of mutuality that supports their joint ventures" (Swick 1991, 1). Certainly, supporting children's learning is a common goal for both parents and school personnel. As in any partnership, all parties involved must exhibit certain characteristics and ways of behaving toward one another. Certain attributes are correlated with successful partnerships. For parents, these attributes include warmth, sensitivity, nurturance, the ability to listen, consistency, a positive self-image, a sense of efficacy, personal competence, and effective interpersonal skills (Swick 1991). Attributes for teachers include warmth, openness, sensitivity, flexibility, reliability, and accessibility (Comer and Haynes 1991).

Integral to the adoption of policies and procedures for parent involvement are the related beliefs held by school personnel. The following assumptions or beliefs form the basis for developing partnerships with all families (Knight 1987).

- Parents are their children's first and most important teachers.
- Parents love their children and want the best possible education for them.
- Parents will participate in ways they can in light of their cultural, family, and personal priorities.
- Parents participate when they feel accepted, cared about, and respected by school personnel.
- Students benefit from their parents' active involvement in schooling.
- A parent involvement program is only as successful as the school leadership and staff believes it can be.

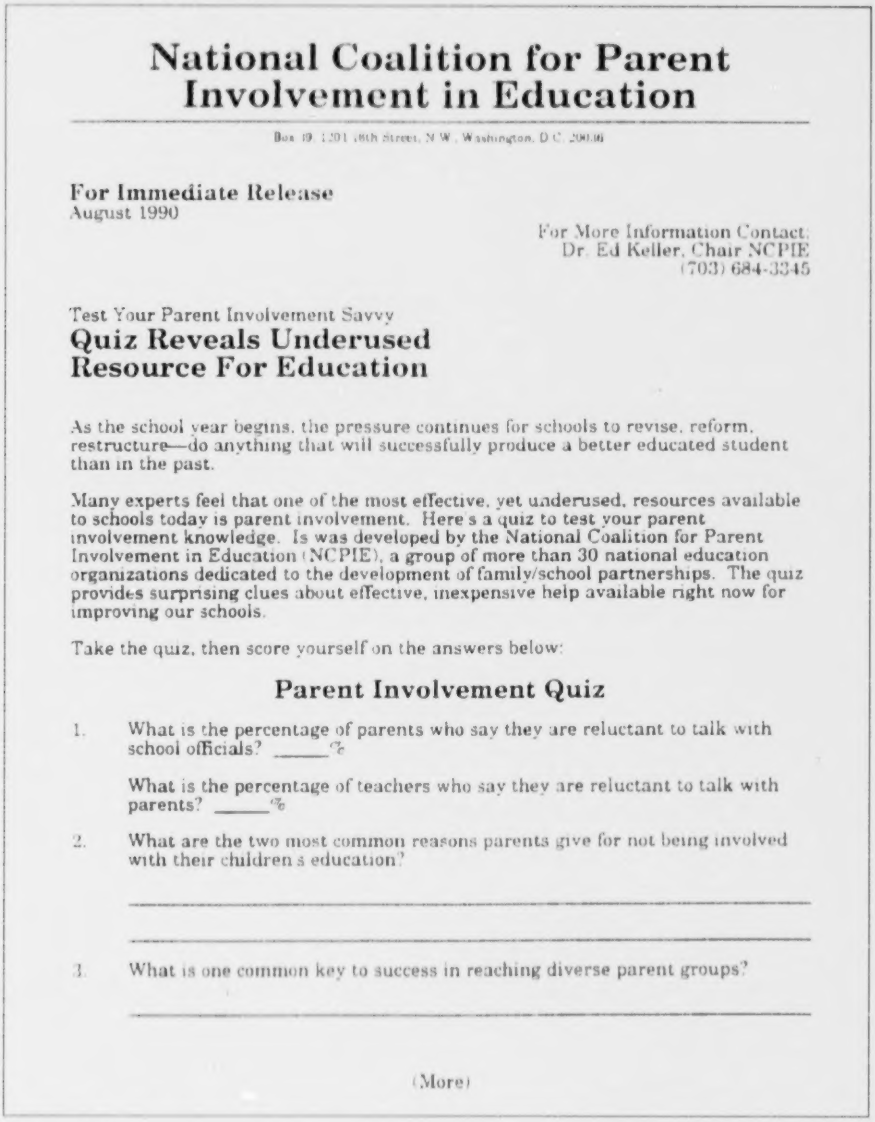
The determination of specific beliefs or assumptions about parent involvement is an important first step for school staff members charged with the task of developing policies and procedures reflective of a strong family-centered focus.

General Policy Suggestions

Clearly, leaders at the federal and state levels have become increasingly aware of the necessity for involving parents in the education of their children. Title

One, Head Start, and other federal programs mandate consultation and collaboration with parents. These mandates, in turn, affect state and district policies requiring parent involvement for other programs and other grade levels, as well. Forming policies and procedures uniquely suited to each school system and school is the task of school leaders, with input from teachers, administrators, parents, students, and the community. There are, however, some key concepts that need to be reflected in the policies and procedures that are adopted. The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) suggests that policies provide ways for parents to become knowledgeable about the opportunities that exist for parent involvement and the provision of regular communications from the school concerning the school programs and their children's specific progress in relation to the goals and objectives of those programs. Further, policies relating to opportunities for parents to assist in the instructional process at school and at home and opportunities for involvement of parents of children at all ages and grade levels should be included. Finally, all policies should reflect a recognition of diverse family structures, lifestyles, cultures, education levels, and language differences. With respect to the continued development of teachers, NCPIE suggests policies that provide for professional development for teachers and principals to enhance their effectiveness in working with parents. And to foster strong ties within the community and to better meet the needs of the family populations served by the school, NCPIE suggests policies mandating linkages with social service agencies and community groups. To help increase the awareness of parents and educators about the importance of parent involvement, NCPIE has developed the Parent Involvement Quiz (see Figure 3.1). After responding to each question, use the answer key in Figure 3.2. Allow ten points for each question answered correctly and five points for each correct answer on two-part questions. According to the scoring directions provided by NCPIE, 90 to 100 points is excellent; 75 to 85 is good; 60 to 70 is just average. Scores below 60 indicate that one may be overlooking the tremendous resource of parent involvement in helping all children achieve.

Although not intended as statements of policy, the following Seven Basic Principles of Parent Involvement Programs (Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms 1989) can serve to alert school personnel to specific areas deserving of attention in a policy and procedural manual. The principles, as stated by these authors, include references to an open, welcoming school climate where parents are treated as partners in their children's education and where frequent, two-way communications between school and home exist. Also included is an emphasis on the responsibility of the teachers as well as the administrators to actively promote partnership with all families. This includes encouraging parents to join in the decision-making process and to volunteer their time in school or home-learning activities.



National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

Box 39, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

For Immediate Release
August 1990

For More Information Contact:
Dr. Ed Keller, Chair NCPIE
(703) 684-3345

Test Your Parent Involvement Savvy

Quiz Reveals Underused Resource For Education

As the school year begins, the pressure continues for schools to revise, reform, restructure—do anything that will successfully produce a better educated student than in the past.

Many experts feel that one of the most effective, yet underused, resources available to schools today is parent involvement. Here's a quiz to test your parent involvement knowledge. Is was developed by the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE), a group of more than 30 national education organizations dedicated to the development of family/school partnerships. The quiz provides surprising clues about effective, inexpensive help available right now for improving our schools.

Take the quiz, then score yourself on the answers below:

Parent Involvement Quiz

1. What is the percentage of parents who say they are reluctant to talk with school officials? ______%

   What is the percentage of teachers who say they are reluctant to talk with parents? ______%

2. What are the two most common reasons parents give for not being involved with their children's education?

   ____

   ____

3. What is one common key to success in reaching diverse parent groups?

   ____

(More)

Figure 3.1

Characteristics of Effective School Handbooks

Every school has a need to convey to parents some general policies and procedures. Handbooks containing this information are very useful to parents who need basic information about how the school is run: arrival and dismissal times, the school calendar, the lunch program, codes of conduct, and so on. Unlike many other documents and notices sent home throughout the year, this one has a chance of being read! Parents who are new to the school

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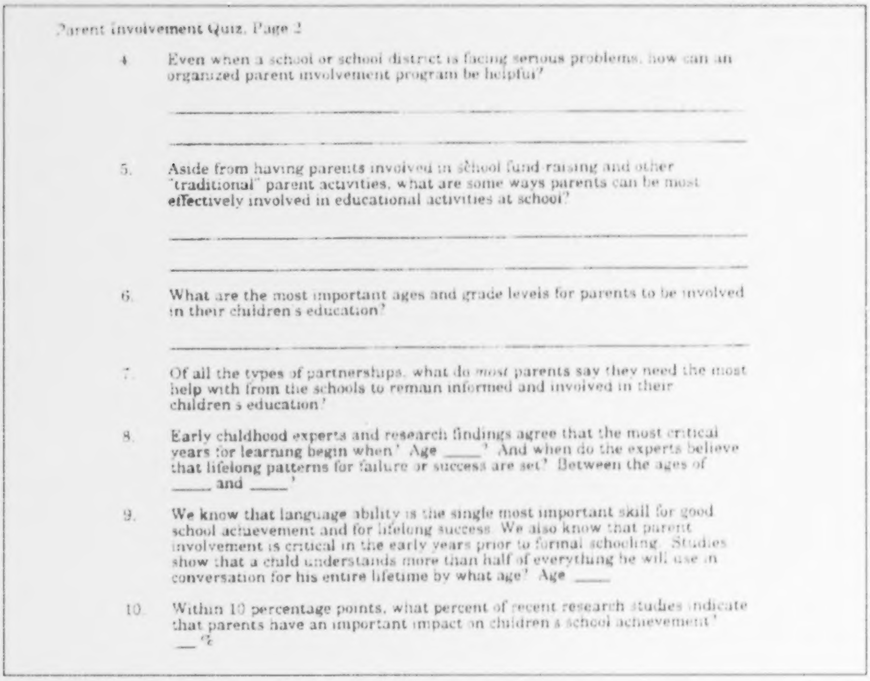

Parent Involvement Quiz, Page 2

4. Even when a school or school district is facing serious problems, how can an organized parent involvement program be helpful?

____

____

5. Aside from having parents involved in school fund-raising and other "traditional" parent activities, what are some ways parents can be most effectively involved in educational activities at school?

____

____

6. What are the most important ages and grade levels for parents to be involved in their children's education?

____

7. Of all the types of partnerships, what do *most* parents say they need the most help with from the schools to remain informed and involved in their children's education?

8. Early childhood experts and research findings agree that the most critical years for learning begin when? Age ____? And when do the experts believe that lifelong patterns for failure or success are set? Between the ages of ____ and ____?

9. We know that language ability is the single most important skill for good school achievement and for lifelong success. We also know that parent involvement is critical in the early years prior to formal schooling. Studies show that a child understands more than half of everything he will use in conversation for his entire lifetime by what age? Age ____

10. Within 10 percentage points, what percent of recent research studies indicate that parents have an important impact on children's school achievement? __%

***Figure 3.1** (continued)*

How Did You Score?

1. **Reluctance to contact one another.** According to the Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1987, 19 percent of parents said they feel awkward or reluctant to talk with school officials, while 55 percent of teachers said they feel uneasy or reluctant to approach parents to talk about their child.
2. **Why parents say they are not involved.** Studies show that parents often say they are not involved because (1) they do not have time and (2) they do not know what to do. Some research indicates that parents will make time to help their children if they are shown what they can do. Strategies to help parents better use the time they do have are needed.
3. **Success in reaching diverse parent groups.** Experienced educators say the key to success in reaching diverse parent groups is to schedule programs and activities flexibly to accommodate different cultural norms, parents, interests, and skills, as well as today's variety of family living styles.
4. **School problems and parent involvement.** Organized involvement, particularly parent meetings, can help even when schools are experiencing problems. Parent groups can serve as a forum for discussion, a means of mobilizing support, and a conduit for change
5. **Effective ways to involve parents.** Experienced educators say parents can be very effectively involved in educational activities at school as volunteer tutors, class-

***Figure 3.2** (Continued on next page)*

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room aides, and invited speakers. The ways parents can help their children at home should also be stressed, since much of every child's education takes place away from the school.

6. **Best ages, grades for parent involvement.** Experts say it is important for parents to be involved in their children's education at *all* ages and grade levels.
7. **What parents say they want help with from schools.** Surveys show that most parents want more information on how to help their own child at home each school year. This includes how to monitor homework, discuss schoolwork, and interact to encourage good work in all subjects.
8. **Start of most critical learning years.** While it is essential that schools and parents work together, experts and researchers agree that the critical years for learning begin long before the child reaches school—*at birth.* And the experts believe that lifelong patterns for failure or success are set between the ages of 3 and 8. These findings point to the critical need for parents to be involved in the education of their children well before they start school. Then the stage is set for vital parent involvement throughout the school years as well.

Figure 3.2 *(continued)*

are often insecure about what they can expect from the school. Parents of returning students want to know about the schedule for the current year and about any staff program and policy changes. Handbooks provide this information and much more. Still, schools miss an enormous opportunity when they don't utilize the handbook as a public relations tool—an advertisement, so to speak—for all the good programs and traditions ongoing in the school.

Like any informational literature to be distributed to a wide public audience, school handbooks should be neatly presented and easy to read. Wide margins, appealing graphics, and use of varying fonts and type styles serve to make the handbook attractive. Clear headings and subheadings, as well as the inclusion of a table of contents, assist readers in readily locating necessary information. The content should be as brief and direct as possible, yet adequately present the necessary information. And, probably most important, the information should be presented in language that is clear, concise, and free from educational jargon.

At Oakwood School we strive to communicate the whole tone or climate of our learning community through our school handbook. One way we do this is by having our handbook reflect the curricular theme we are celebrating that year. Each year, we embark on a different schoolwide theme. The theme is selected with input from teachers and the previous year's students. The year the nation celebrated the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage, our theme was "Columbus's Voyage." Another year the theme was taking care of the earth. Depicted in Figure 3.3 is the cover for our handbook the year our theme was "celebrating our heritage." A printing company that sells personalized T-shirts had its artist design the cover based on our ideas. We took orders for T-shirts for the children and their parents, and the company gave us a copy of the design to use as the cover for our school handbook.

Having a yearly schoolwide theme has become a tradition at Oakwood School. The parents and the community look forward to learning about each new theme, and they have come to rely on the school handbook to provide an introduction of the theme for each current year.

Suggested Contents

The school handbook is a good tool to use for communicating general information about the school to parents, students, school personnel, and members of the community. It can also serve as a vehicle for sharing the school's philosophy, mission statement, and purpose, as well as conveying a strong commitment toward forging educational partnerships with families and members of the community. The handbook should, above all, *convey a positive tone and message*, rather than project a negative or authoritarian attitude. For example, although behavior codes should be explicitly stated in the handbook, a listing of forty-two rules at the beginning of the handbook does little to establish a warm feeling of partnership.

Fig. 3

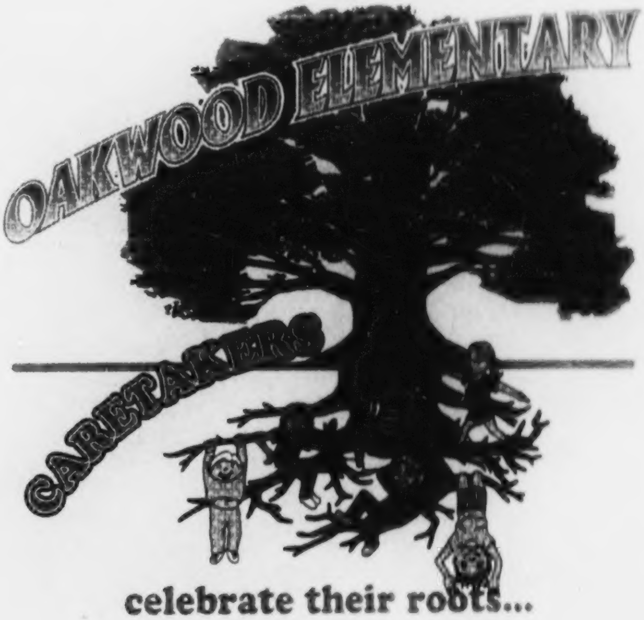
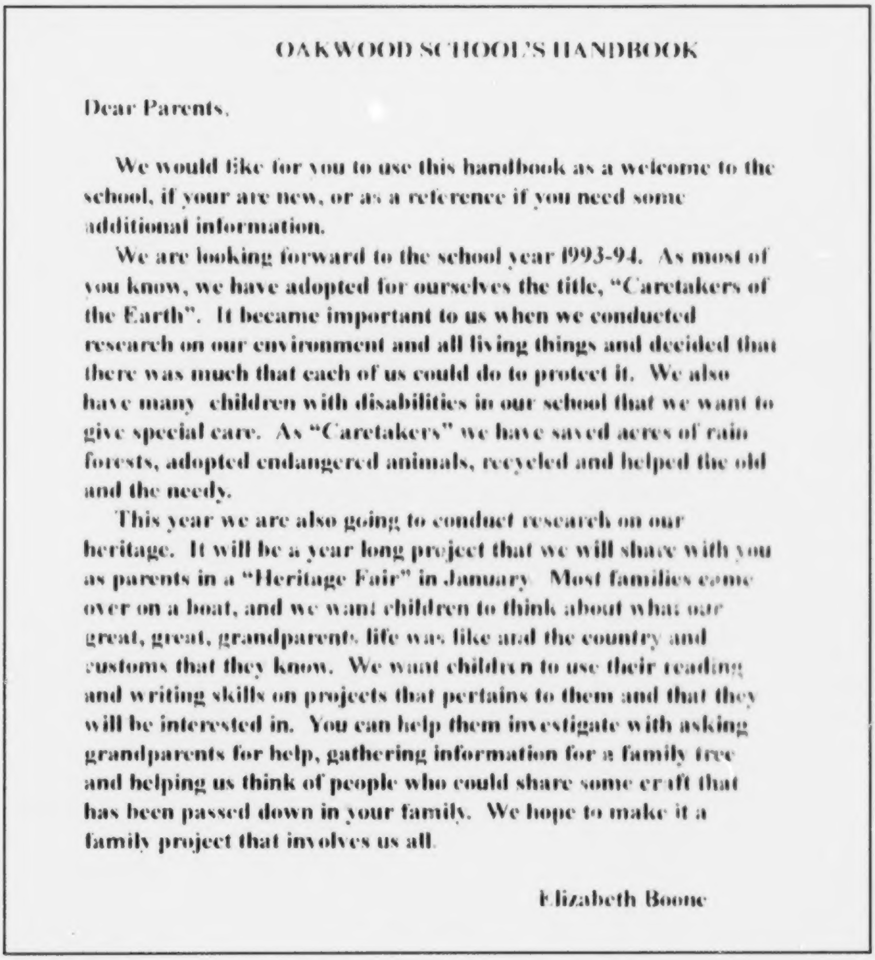


Figure 3.3

A letter of introduction or welcome from the building principal is a nice first entry. The letter, printed just inside the front cover, could give an overview of the year to come and perhaps reveal some schoolwide purposes or goals. In it the principal may explain the school philosophy and mission statement. Most of all, though, the letter should serve as a personal welcome for the parents and students (see Figure 3.4).

If your school has a parent-teacher organization, you may want to ask the president, the volunteer coordinator, or another officer to provide a letter of welcome for inclusion in the handbook. This letter may outline activities for the coming year, a schedule of meetings and special activities, and information about services available to fellow parents, as well as information about joining the parent-teacher organization. In Figure 3.5 is a sample letter from the Oakwood School handbook.



OAKWOOD SCHOOL'S HANDBOOK

Dear Parents,

We would like for you to use this handbook as a welcome to the school, if your are new, or as a reference if you need some additional information.

We are looking forward to the school year 1993-94. As most of you know, we have adopted for ourselves the title, "Caretakers of the Earth". It became important to us when we conducted research on our environment and all living things and decided that there was much that each of us could do to protect it. We also have many children with disabilities in our school that we want to give special care. As "Caretakers" we have saved acres of rain forests, adopted endangered animals, recycled and helped the old and the needy.

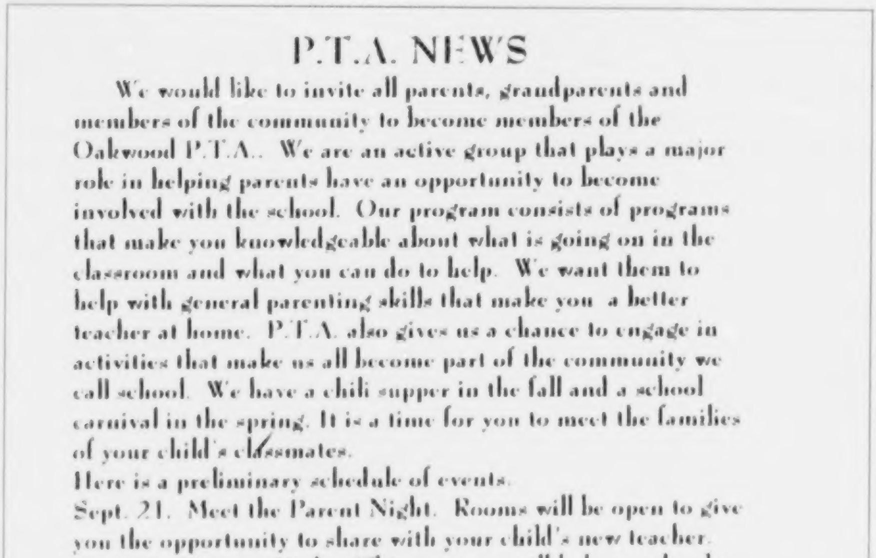
This year we are also going to conduct research on our heritage. It will be a year long project that we will share with you as parents in a "Heritage Fair" in January. Most families came over on a boat, and we want children to think about what our great, great, grandparents life was like and the country and customs that they know. We want children to use their reading and writing skills on projects that pertains to them and that they will be interested in. You can help them investigate with asking grandparents for help, gathering information for a family tree and helping us think of people who could share some craft that has been passed down in your family. We hope to make it a family project that involves us all.

Elizabeth Boone

Figure 3.4

The Oakwood School handbook also includes information about special services. For example, the guidance counselors have developed a page explaining services available to children and parents (see Figure 3.6).

In the preceding paragraphs we have described some of the information included in the handbook for Oakwood School. Your faculty, or a representative committee, will want to discuss topics for inclusion in your school handbook. Although some topics are unique to an individual school or district, Figure 3.7 lists a sample table of contents of common topics.



P.T.A. NEWS

We would like to invite all parents, grandparents and members of the community to become members of the Oakwood P.T.A.. We are an active group that plays a major role in helping parents have an opportunity to become involved with the school. Our program consists of programs that make you knowledgeable about what is going on in the classroom and what you can do to help. We want them to help with general parenting skills that make you a better teacher at home. P.T.A. also gives us a chance to engage in activities that make us all become part of the community we call school. We have a chili supper in the fall and a school carnival in the spring. It is a time for you to meet the families of your child's classmates.

Here is a preliminary schedule of events.

Sept. 21. Meet the Parent Night. Rooms will be open to give you the opportunity to share with your child's new teacher.

Oct. 19. Literacy Night. This program will help you develop skills to become a better teacher of reading and writing at home.

Nov. 16. Open House and the Chili Supper.

Dec. 21. Christmas Program. The Caretaker Choir will share songs of Christmas from many cultures.

Jan. 18. Heritage Night. Parents will be issued passports to visit all rooms to view the research that has taken place in the study of the many cultures that make up the heritage of all of us.

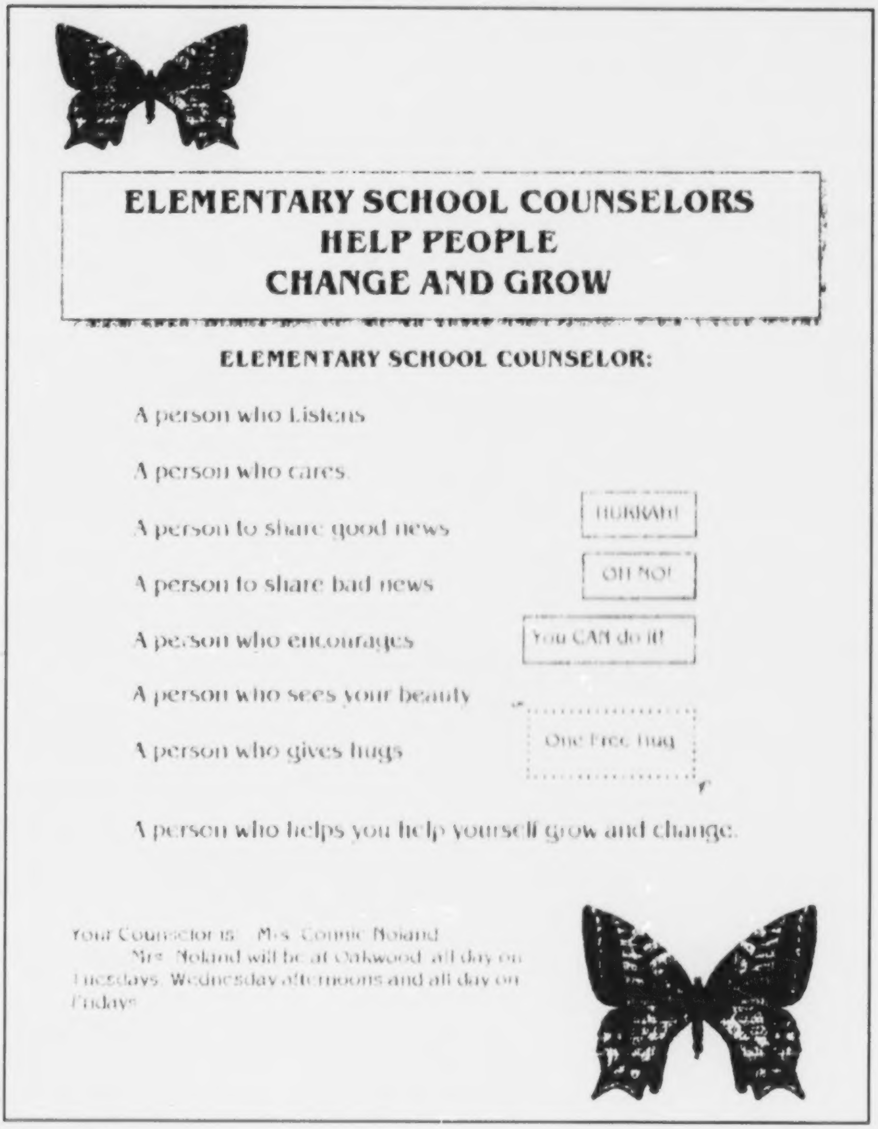
Feb. 15. P.E. Curriculum Sharing. Mrs. Zumwalt will have children demonstrate what they are working on in P.E. class.

March 15. Fine Arts Curriculum Sharing. The art department along with the Oakwood Author winners will be featured.

April 19. Kindergarten Program.

Gayle Park - Parent Volunteer
221-0668

Figure 3.5



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS HELP PEOPLE CHANGE AND GROW

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR:

A person who Listens

A person who cares.

A person to share good news

HURRAH!

A person to share bad news

OH NO!

A person who encourages

You CAN do it!

A person who sees your beauty

A person who gives hugs

One Free Hug

A person who helps you help yourself grow and change.

Your Counselor is: Mrs. Connie Noland
Mrs. Noland will be at Oakwood all day on Tuesdays, Wednesday afternoons and all day on Fridays

Figure 3.6

The contents for a preschool center handbook would be somewhat different. In Figure 3.8 is the table of contents of the parent handbook for the Western Illinois University Infant and Preschool Center. Note the entries under the heading "Parent Involvement." As in the suggested handbook for an elementary school, the curriculum philosophy would be clearly explained (see Figure 3.9).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Welcome to YOUR school: A Letter from the Principal
- Working as Partners: School Philosophy
- Mission Statement and Purpose
- Curricular Approach
- Special Programs
  - After-school program
  - Bilingual program
  - Title One reading and math
  - Guidance counselor
  - Special education resources
  - Speech and language program
- Home-School Connections
  - Home-learning activities
  - Conferences
  - Parent education opportunities
  - Parent resource library
  - Reporting pupil progress
  - Parent advisory council
  - School volunteer program
  - Home school organization
  - Parents-helping-parents program
- Routine Policies, Procedures, and Regulations
  - Attendance
  - Grading system
  - School lunch and nutrition program
  - Transportation schedules and regulations
  - Health and immunization policies
  - Emergency and safety procedures and policies
  - Student fees
- Behavior Codes
- Sample Daily and Weekly Schedules
- School Calendar
- School Staff
- District Staff and School Board Members
- Community Resources

Figure 3.7

Developing the Handbook: A Suggested Process

In the last section we discussed forming a handbook committee comprised of the whole faculty, or a representative group, and the principal. Additionally, inviting one or two parents to serve on the handbook committee to provide

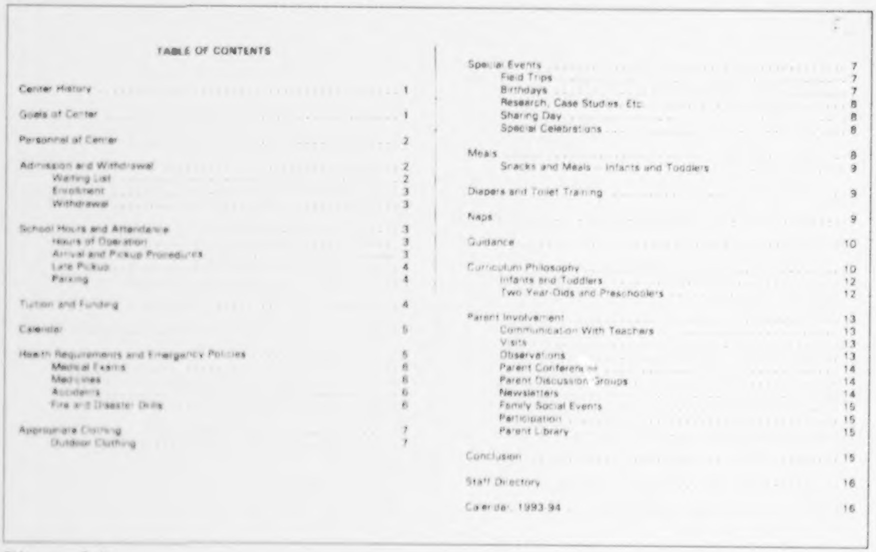


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Center History 1

Goals of Center 1

Personnel of Center 2

Admission and Withdrawal 2
    Waiting List 2
    Enrollment 3
    Withdrawal 3

School Hours and Attendance 3
    Hours of Operation 3
    Arrival and Pickup Procedures 3
    Late Pickup 4
    Parking 4

Tuition and Funding 4

Calendar 5

Health Requirements and Emergency Policies 5
    Medical Exams 6
    Medicines 6
    Accidents 6
    Fire and Disaster Drills 6

Appropriate Clothing 7
    Outdoor Clothing 7

Special Events 7
    Field Trips 7
    Birthdays 7
    Research, Case Studies, Etc. 8
    Sharing Day 8
    Special Celebrations 8

Meals 8
    Snacks and Meals — Infants and Toddlers 9

Diapers and Toilet Training 9

Naps 9

Guidance 10

Curriculum Philosophy 10
    Infants and Toddlers 12
    Two Year-Olds and Preschoolers 12

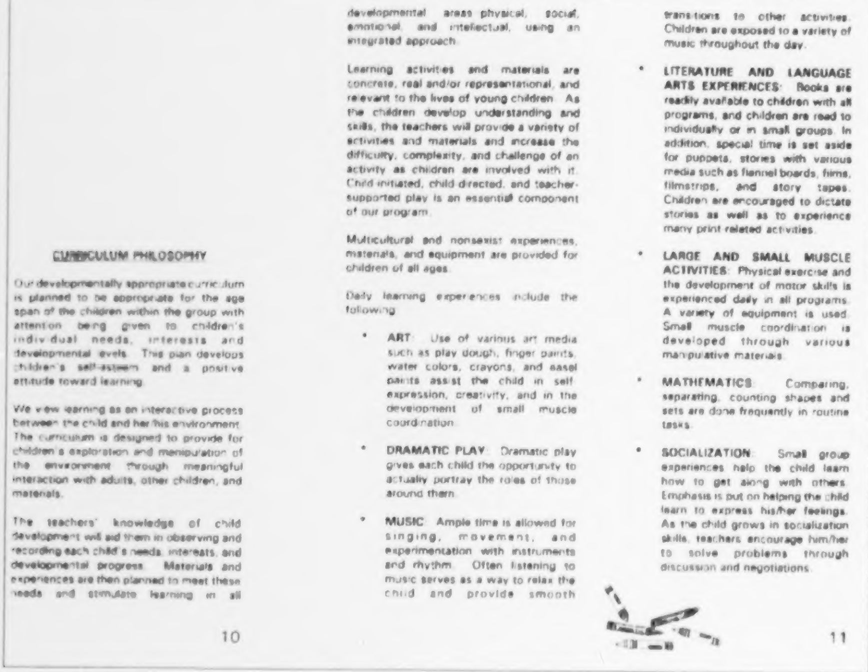
Parent Involvement 13
    Communication With Teachers 13
    Visits 13
    Observations 13
    Parent Conferences 14
    Parent Discussion Groups 14
    Newsletters 14
    Family Social Events 15
    Participation 15
    Parent Library 15

Conclusion 15

Staff Directory 16

Calendar, 1993-94 16

Figure 3.8



CURRICULUM PHILOSOPHY

Our developmentally appropriate curriculum is planned to be appropriate for the age span of the children within the group with attention being given to children's individual needs, interests and developmental levels. This plan develops children's self-esteem and a positive attitude toward learning.

We view learning as an interactive process between the child and her/his environment. The curriculum is designed to provide for children's exploration and manipulation of the environment through meaningful interaction with adults, other children, and materials.

The teachers' knowledge of child development will aid them in observing and recording each child's needs, interests, and developmental progress. Materials and experiences are then planned to meet these needs and stimulate learning in all developmental areas physical, social, emotional, and intellectual, using an integrated approach.

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Learning activities and materials are concrete, real and/or representational, and relevant to the lives of young children. As the children develop understanding and skills, the teachers will provide a variety of activities and materials and increase the difficulty, complexity, and challenge of an activity as children are involved with it. Child initiated, child directed, and teacher-supported play is an essential component of our program.

Multicultural and nonsexist experiences, materials, and equipment are provided for children of all ages.

Daily learning experiences include the following:

- **ART**: Use of various art media such as play dough, finger paints, water colors, crayons, and easel paints assist the child in self-expression, creativity, and in the development of small muscle coordination.
- **DRAMATIC PLAY**: Dramatic play gives each child the opportunity to actually portray the roles of those around them.
- **MUSIC**: Ample time is allowed for singing, movement, and experimentation with instruments and rhythm. Often listening to music serves as a way to relax the child and provide smooth transitions to other activities. Children are exposed to a variety of music throughout the day.
- **LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE ARTS EXPERIENCES**: Books are readily available to children with all programs, and children are read to individually or in small groups. In addition, special time is set aside for puppets, stories with various media such as flannel boards, films, filmstrips, and story tapes. Children are encouraged to dictate stories as well as to experience many print related activities.
- **LARGE AND SMALL MUSCLE ACTIVITIES**: Physical exercise and the development of motor skills is experienced daily in all programs. A variety of equipment is used. Small muscle coordination is developed through various manipulative materials.
- **MATHEMATICS**: Comparing, separating, counting shapes and sets are done frequently in routine tasks.
- **SOCIALIZATION**: Small group experiences help the child learn how to get along with others. Emphasis is put on helping the child learn to express his/her feelings. As the child grows in socialization skills, teachers encourage him/her to solve problems through discussion and negotiations.

11

Figure 3.9

the parental perspective is a good idea. Some schools find it helpful to survey parents for topics they would like to see addressed in the handbook. Although the committee may find it necessary to narrow the topics included so as not to produce a document that is unwieldy, having as much input as possible will be helpful to you at this stage in your work.

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Once topics have been identified, the committee can discuss and clarify the information to be presented in the handbook for each topic. Following consensus on each of the major issues, topics may then be divided among the group members who will assume responsibility for writing a draft of what might appear in the handbook. Or one person may be responsible for creating a draft of the entire handbook, which would then be brought before the committee for review and suggestions for revision. Either way, the entire group needs to have an opportunity to review and approve the final draft.

Some thought will need to go into how best to print and bind the handbook, with consideration given to readability and attractiveness, as well as cost. With computer word processing and desktop publishing programs readily accessible in practically every school, the cost involved in preparing an appealing, reader-friendly document should be minimal. With respect to binding, some schools simply duplicate their handbook on 8 1/2 x 11 inch sheets of white paper and staple the pages together. Others use half sheets, folded in "book" form. Still other schools elect to have their handbooks bound in some way that allows for the addition and/or substitution of pages throughout the year. Cost, again, is a factor. Although initial costs are greater, binding that allows for alterations may be more cost effective in the long run if changes and additions are expected. Either way, an attractive cover printed on heavier card stock and in the school colors serves to publicize your school in a positive way.

With respect to printing the handbook, as school populations become increasingly diverse, the need for translating important school documents into languages other than English becomes a real consideration. Parents for whom English is a second language can perform a great service to schools and to fellow parents by translating the school handbook. (One resource for preparing documents in Spanish is the *Bilingual Writing Center*, a user-friendly computer software program for creating school newsletters and reports in one-, two-, or three-column formats. This program is available from the Learning Company for both DOS and Macintosh computers and contains a variety of fonts and graphics.)

Disseminating the Handbook

A final issue to be addressed by the group is the distribution of the handbook. How and when the handbook will be shared with parents and key community members bears careful thought and discussion. Some schools distribute the handbook during school registration at the start of a new school year, knowing that they are likely to reach the greatest number of parents at this time. Other schools give each family a handbook during a "back-to-school" night or "orientation" meeting held prior to or during the first weeks of the school year. Handbooks are sometimes mailed to parents not in attendance at this first meeting.

Key consideration should be given to parents' use of the handbook. You may decide to feature the handbook at a classroom, school, or parent organization meeting held during the first week of school. References can then be made to various sections in the handbook, with the principal, teachers, other school personnel, and parent leaders present to share additional information and to answer questions.

Disseminating your school handbook to community agencies/organizations, real estate agencies, health care providers, and so forth is often a good public relations tactic. Much of the voting public no longer has school-age children. Sharing in-depth and accurate information is important, and the cost involved in sending out twenty-five or so additional handbooks is minimal compared to the benefits that could be gained. Think of places where large numbers of individuals are likely to visit, such as doctors' and dentists' offices. One handbook placed in a health clinic has the potential for being read, or at least browsed through, by hundreds of individuals each month!

Finally, school board members and central office staff members should receive a copy of your school handbook. Attached to the handbooks disseminated to these individuals might be a letter from the principal in which the *process* through which the handbook was developed and distributed is briefly described. The sharing of this information helps school board members and district leaders better understand the seriousness with which your school addressed this task and the commitment you feel toward the end product.

Evaluating an Existing School Handbook

The survey appearing in Figure 3.10 may be useful to school personnel and parent leaders who wish to evaluate an existing handbook. Recognizing the uniqueness of each school and its parent population, before responding to the survey the committee may wish to study the items included and suggest other pertinent questions that should be added. Responses to the survey can be compiled and used to assist the committee in revising the handbook to better meet the needs of the parents and the school staff.

SUMMARY

The process of writing a school handbook that reflects a strong partnership approach and makes a warm and reassuring first impression on the reader is not an easy one. Developing statements of philosophy, mission, and purpose that portray a family-centered approach to schooling, deciding on topics to be included, and reaching consensus for information to be shared about each topic require a deep commitment on the part of the school personnel and parent leaders involved in the process. We caution you not to succumb to the tendency to shortchange this process. Your final product—a well-written and carefully constructed school handbook that accurately communicates impor-

SURVEY OF EXISTING SCHOOL HANDBOOK

	Yes/	No/	Undecided/	Comments
1. The school handbook is effective in communicating general information about the school program.				
2. The school handbook adequately conveys the school philosophy, mission statement, and purpose.				
3. The school handbook conveys a strong commitment to developing strong home-school partnerships.				
4. The school handbook conveys a positive image for the school.				
5. The school handbook is attractive.				
6. The school handbook is easy to read.				
7. The school handbook is effectively organized, making it easy to locate needed information.				
8. The school handbook is written in clear, concise language that is free from educational jargon.				
9. The school handbook conveys a positive tone and message rather than a negative or authoritarian attitude.				
10. The school handbook reflects shared beliefs and consensus as to the policies, procedures, and regulations described.				
11. The school handbook includes information about all of the topics that should be included in our handbook.				
12. The school handbook includes adequate, up-to-date information about each topic covered.				
13. The school handbook is available in languages other than English, as needed.				

Figure 3.10

tant information about your school—can best be realized through a shared decision-making approach.

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Chapter 4

Read All about It!
Creating Effective Written Communications for Classrooms and Schools

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Communicating with parents is a responsibility of every classroom teacher. I began to see wonderful *classroom newsletters when I suggested that teachers include them in their teacher evaluation portfolios. The newsletters were concrete evidence of the efforts teachers were making to involve parents. They also gave me insight into classroom activities I might have otherwise missed.*

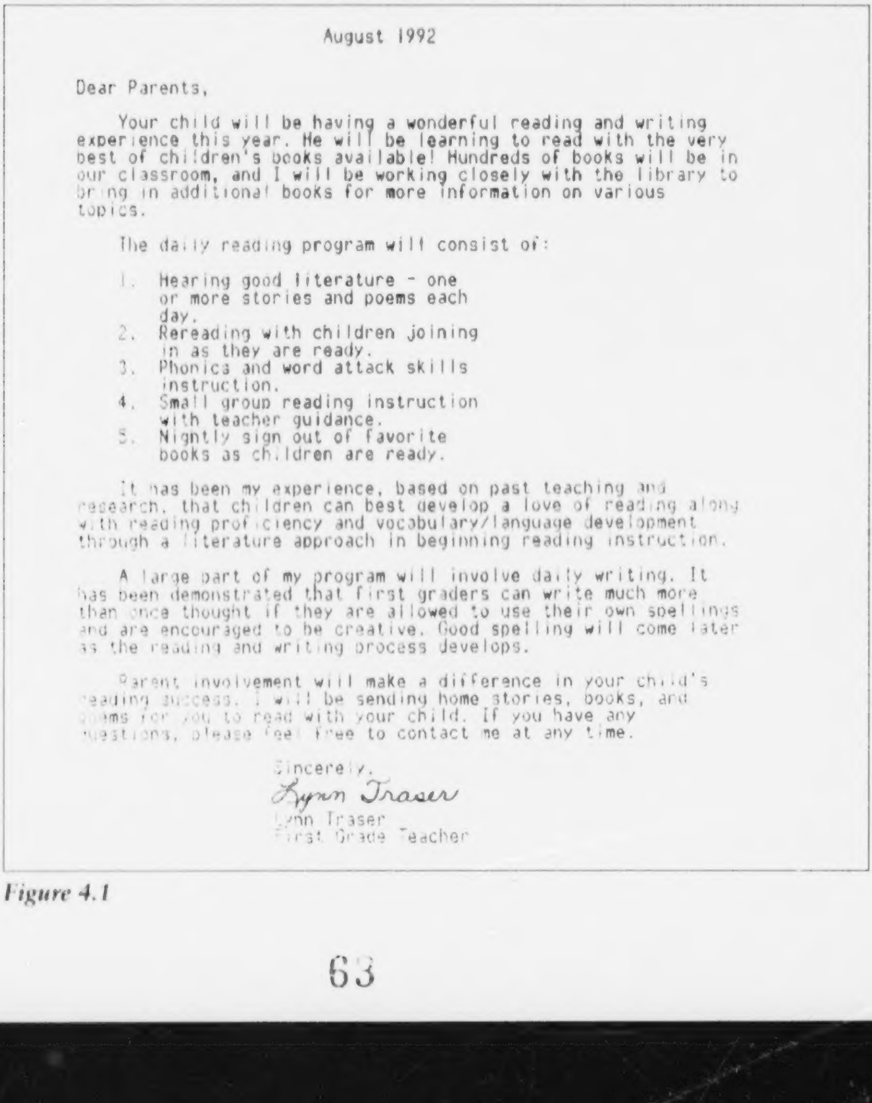
Goals for home-school communication include the design of effective forms of communication to reach parents and the provision for two-way communication. In this chapter we will discuss characteristics of effective letters and newsletters, two good tools for communicating to parents the ongoing activities in a particular classroom, program, school, or district. Then, in the chapters that follow, we will discuss strategies and tools that serve to initiate two-way communication between the home and school.

Friendly Letters

Some teachers set the stage for communication by sending a letter to each student and his or her family prior to the start of the new school year. This letter serves as a welcome to the classroom and an introduction to the teacher. It is also an opportunity for the teacher to set expectations and goals, describe the classroom procedures, share reading lists and projects, and describe opportunities for families to be involved in the classroom. Included also might be the telephone numbers where the teacher can be reached and best times for parents to call. In schools where the classroom roster is not available prior to the first day of school, some teachers prepare a letter to send home with the children on the first day of school. This letter often serves as the family's first contact with the teacher and as such should convey a warm, personal introduction. Reproducible letters found in commercial publications may have some helpful ideas, but they do not convey the desired personal touch. For this reason we heartily recommend that teachers write their own letters, using language appropriate for their parent population and including information unique to their own background and classroom. Some teachers find writing letters to parents to be an effective way to share information about the curriculum and strategies for parents to use at home. In Figure 4.1 we see an example of a letter sent home during the first week of school by first-grade teacher Lynn Traser. This letter describing the reading and writing program was attached to an invitation to a parent meeting planned for the purpose of learning more about the first-grade curriculum.

Letter writing was a very effective strategy for Lynn, so she continued this practice on a regular basis throughout the school year. As you will note in Figure 4.2, Lynn's letters project a warm, friendly tone and convey a strong commitment to a partnership concept.

Regular communication with parents about curricular activities is just as important in classrooms for very young children. In Figure 4.3 is a sample of the weekly letters sent home with the youngest group of children enrolled in the Western Illinois University Infant and Preschool Center. Teachers at the center are establishing an early pattern of home-school communication that will, hopefully, continue for many years to come.



August 1992

Dear Parents,

Your child will be having a wonderful reading and writing experience this year. He will be learning to read with the very best of children's books available! Hundreds of books will be in our classroom, and I will be working closely with the library to bring in additional books for more information on various topics.

The daily reading program will consist of:

1. Hearing good literature - one or more stories and poems each day.
2. Rereading with children joining in as they are ready.
3. Phonics and word attack skills instruction.
4. Small group reading instruction with teacher guidance.
5. Nightly sign out of favorite books as children are ready.

It has been my experience, based on past teaching and research, that children can best develop a love of reading along with reading proficiency and vocabulary/language development through a literature approach in beginning reading instruction.

A large part of my program will involve daily writing. It has been demonstrated that first graders can write much more than once thought if they are allowed to use their own spellings and are encouraged to be creative. Good spelling will come later as the reading and writing process develops.

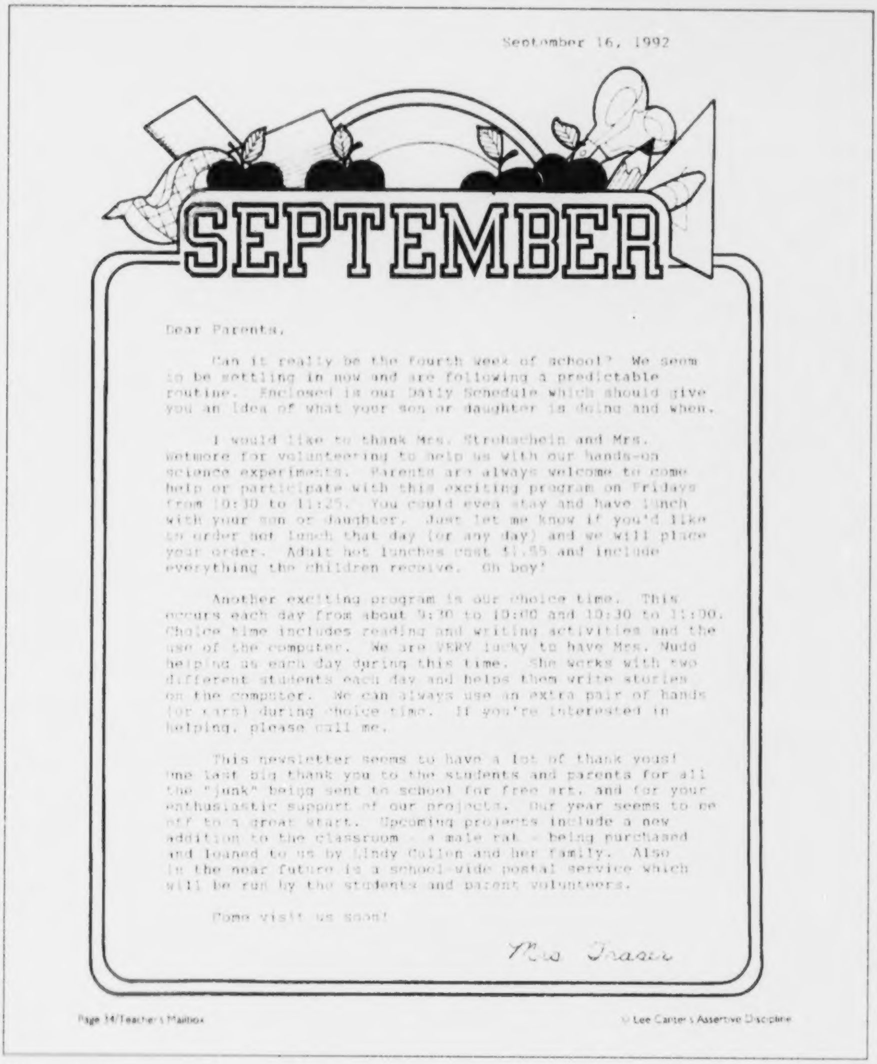
Parent involvement will make a difference in your child's reading success. I will be sending home stories, books, and poems for you to read with your child. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Lynn Traser

Lynn Traser
First Grade Teacher

Figure 4.1



September 16, 1992

SEPTEMBER

Dear Parents,

Can it really be the fourth week of school? We seem to be settling in now and are following a predictable routine. Enclosed is our Daily Schedule which should give you an idea of what your son or daughter is doing and when.

I would like to thank Mrs. Strohschein and Mrs. Wetmore for volunteering to help us with our hands-on science experiments. Parents are always welcome to come help or participate with this exciting program on Fridays from 10:30 to 11:25. You could even stay and have lunch with your son or daughter. Just let me know if you'd like to order hot lunch that day (or any day) and we will place your order. Adult hot lunches cost $1.55 and include everything the children receive. Oh boy!

Another exciting program is our choice time. This occurs each day from about 9:30 to 10:00 and 10:30 to 11:00. Choice time includes reading and writing activities and the use of the computer. We are VERY lucky to have Mrs. Nudd helping us each day during this time. She works with two different students each day and helps them write stories on the computer. We can always use an extra pair of hands (or ears) during choice time. If you're interested in helping, please call me.

This newsletter seems to have a lot of thank yous! One last big thank you to the students and parents for all the "junk" being sent to school for free art, and for your enthusiastic support of our projects. Our year seems to be off to a great start. Upcoming projects include a new addition to the classroom - a male rat - being purchased and loaned to us by Lindy Collen and her family. Also in the near future is a school-wide postal service which will be run by the students and parent volunteers.

Come visit us soon!

Mrs. Fraser

Page 34/Teacher's Mailbox

© Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline

Figure 4.2

A note from Kathy . . .
Part of my workload involves serving as faculty director for our campus Infant and Preschool Center. When we were working toward accreditation by the National Academy of Early Childhood programs, we were surprised at how easily we could "document" our use of developmentally appropriate practices by referring to the weekly newsletters sent home throughout the previous year. Rereading those letters gave us a real feeling of pride! We have a truly outstanding program that seeks to meet the needs of all children and their families . . . and our newsletters are a strong reflection of our beliefs and practices.

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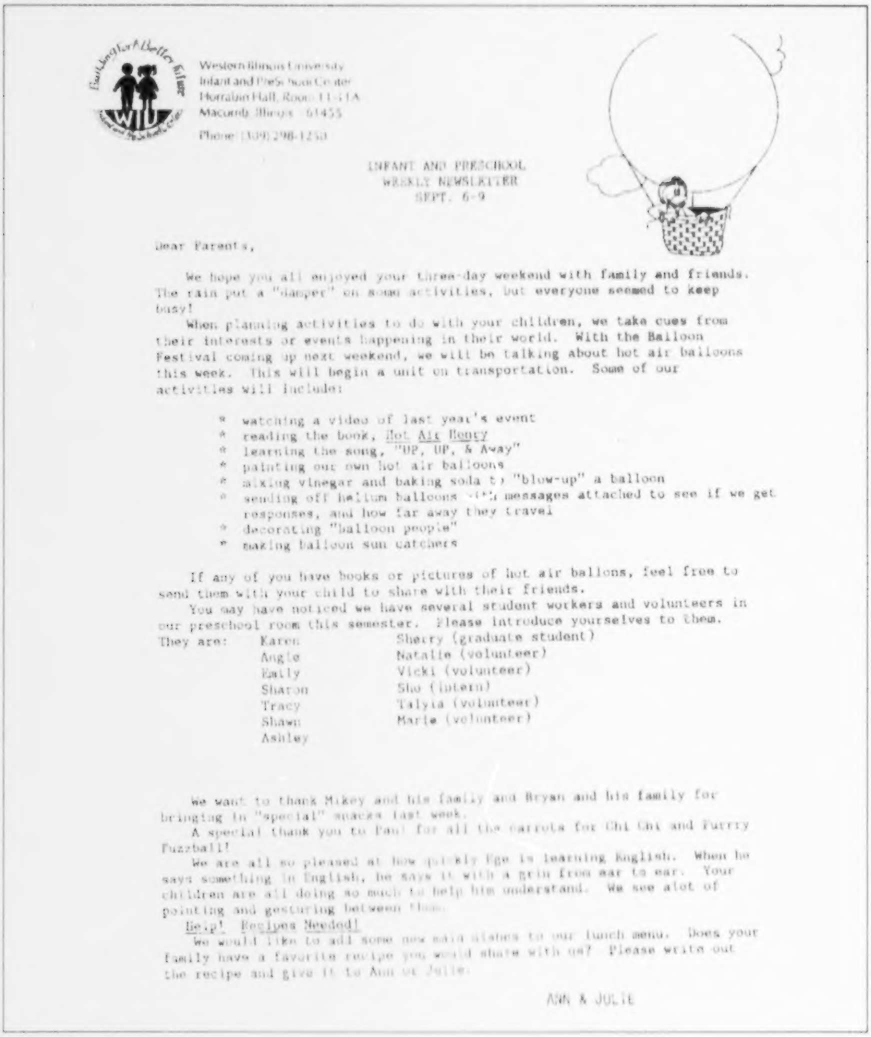

Western Illinois University
Infant and PreSchool Center
Horrabin Hall, Room 11-11A
Macomb, Illinois 61455
Phone (309) 298-1250

INFANT AND PRESCHOOL
WEEKLY NEWSLETTER
SEPT. 6-9

Dear Parents,

We hope you all enjoyed your three-day weekend with family and friends. The rain put a "damper" on some activities, but everyone seemed to keep busy!

When planning activities to do with your children, we take cues from their interests or events happening in their world. With the Balloon Festival coming up next weekend, we will be talking about hot air balloons this week. This will begin a unit on transportation. Some of our activities will include:

- watching a video of last year's event
- reading the book, Hot Air Henry
- learning the song, "UP, UP, & Away"
- painting our own hot air balloons
- mixing vinegar and baking soda to "blow-up" a balloon
- sending off helium balloons with messages attached to see if we get responses, and how far away they travel
- decorating "balloon people"
- making balloon sun catchers

If any of you have books or pictures of hot air ballons, feel free to send them with your child to share with their friends.

You may have noticed we have several student workers and volunteers in our preschool room this semester. Please introduce yourselves to them.

They are: Karen
Angie
Emily
Sharon
Tracy
Shawn
Ashley
Sherry (graduate student)
Natalie (volunteer)
Vicki (volunteer)
Sho (intern)
Talyia (volunteer)
Marie (volunteer)

We want to thank Mikey and his family and Bryan and his family for bringing in "special" snacks last week.

A special thank you to Paul for all the carrots for Chi Chi and Furrry Fuzzball!

We are all so pleased at how quickly Ege is learning English. When he says something in English, he says it with a grin from ear to ear. Your children are all doing so much to help him understand. We see alot of pointing and gesturing between them.

Help! Recipes Needed!

We would like to add some new main dishes to our lunch menu. Does your family have a favorite recipe you would share with us? Please write out the recipe and give it to Ann or Julie.

ANN & JULIE

Figure 4.3

Newsletters

Writing friendly letters to parents is an excellent way for teachers to share their impressions about classroom happenings. As suggested in the last section, letters can provide a warm, personal touch between the teacher and the students' families. When a variety of information is to be shared, such as announcements about upcoming events, needed supplies and materials, and/or home-learning activities, the use of the friendly-letter format is not as effective as a newsletter format. One reason for this is that parents have to reread the entire letter when they want to review information about just one particular item (for example, the date for an upcoming field trip or the title of a suggested book that can be obtained at the library). Included in this section

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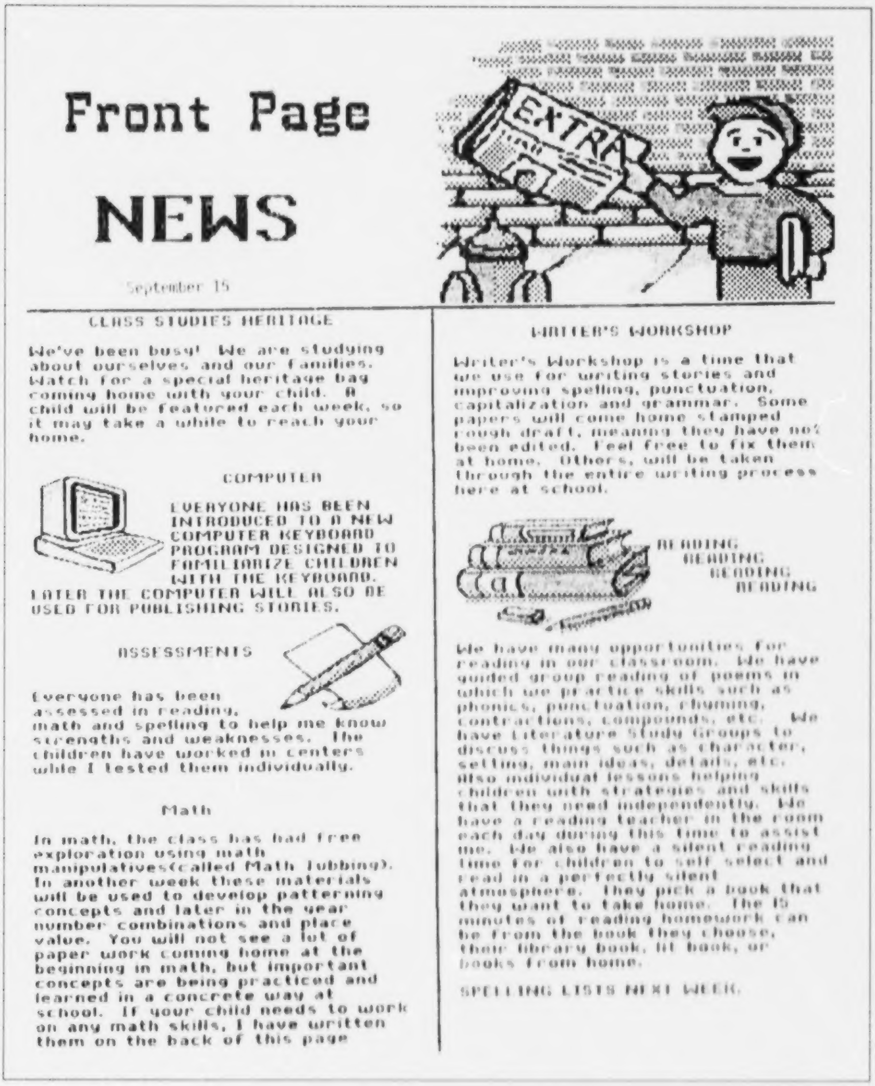
will be a variety of styles and types of newsletters developed for dissemination by classrooms and by schools.

Format and style. Newsletters can be formatted in a variety of ways. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 are examples of newsletters typed in two- and three-column formats, respectively. The use of columns and a smaller font size for the body of each article or entry allows for more information to be included without having the page appear crowded. Notice the use of a masthead or headline with school or classroom name and date. This part of the newsletter should remain consistent throughout the year to assist readers in easily distinguishing the newsletter from other communications that are sent home by the school. If the format of the newsletter and the pictures and print used on the masthead are changed from month to month, parents and other community members to whom the newsletter is sent have a more difficult time identifying the newsletter. You might also consider always using paper of the same color, keeping in mind that paper that is too brightly colored—hot pinks, greens, yellows, oranges, and fluorescent colors—is very hard on the readers' eyes.

Each entry or article needs to be well-spaced, and the use of bold print and larger font sizes for headings or titles of individual entries helps the reader easily locate specific information. "Bullets" can be used to emphasize important points. Similarly, some entries can be enclosed in boxes, and simple graphics can be used to create interest and make the newsletter more appealing to readers.

Office and classroom computers, now readily available, contribute to better-quality newsletters and significantly decrease the time needed to prepare them. It doesn't take a computer expert to use one of the many desktop publishing programs available for preparing newsletters. *The Writing Center* by the Learning Company is available for both IBM/IBM-compatible and Macintosh hardware. The newsletter prepared by Peg Ingebretson (Figure 4.4) was prepared using an early version of this program. The Learning Company also publishes *The Bilingual Writing Center*, set up for either English- or Spanish-speaking users. A variety of other, similar programs are available. Most allow for two- and three-column newsletter preparation, with or without a heading, and include a variety of font styles and graphics.

As with any school or classroom communication tool, the needs of the audience must be considered. For a newsletter to be effective, parents must be able to *read it* or have access to someone who can read it to them. Use of clear, simple sentence structure and nontechnical language will serve to make the newsletter more readable by groups with varied reading levels. Also, while articles do need to be interesting, state the main facts—who, what, when, where—at the very beginning of the article. Another language-related caution must also be taken into account. In our increasingly diverse population, many families need to have written communications available to them in languages other than English. Although this takes time, the effort will be greatly appre-



Front Page NEWS

September 15

CLASS STUDIES HERITAGE

We've been busy! We are studying about ourselves and our families. Watch for a special heritage bag coming home with your child. A child will be featured each week, so it may take a while to reach your home.

COMPUTER

EVERYONE HAS BEEN INTRODUCED TO A NEW COMPUTER KEYBOARD PROGRAM DESIGNED TO FAMILIARIZE CHILDREN WITH THE KEYBOARD. LATER THE COMPUTER WILL ALSO BE USED FOR PUBLISHING STORIES.

ASSESSMENTS

Everyone has been assessed in reading, math and spelling to help me know strengths and weaknesses. The children have worked in centers whle I tested them individually.

Math

In math, the class has had free exploration using math manipulatives(called Math Tubbing). In another week these materials will be used to develop patterning concepts and later in the year number combinations and place value. You will not see a lot of paper work coming home at the beginning in math, but important concepts are being practiced and learned in a concrete way at school. If your child needs to work on any math skills, I have written them on the back of this page

WRITER'S WORKSHOP

Writer's Workshop is a time that we use for writing stories and improving spelling, punctuation, capitalization and grammar. Some papers will come home stamped rough draft, meaning they have not been edited. Feel free to fix them at home. Others, will be taken through the entire writing process here at school.

READING
READING
READING
READING

We have many opportunities for reading in our classroom. We have guided group reading of poems in which we practice skills such as phonics, punctuation, rhyming, contractions, compounds, etc. We have Literature Study Groups to discuss things such as character, setting, main ideas, details, etc. Also individual lessons helping children with strategies and skills that they need independently. We have a reading teacher in the room each day during this time to assist me. We also have a silent reading time for children to self select and read in a perfectly silent atmosphere. They pick a book that they want to take home. The 15 minutes of reading homework can be from the book they choose, their library book, lit book, or books from home.

SPELLING LISTS NEXT WEEK.

Figure 4.4

ciated by non-English-speaking family members. Sometimes parents or older students can translate the newsletters for the teacher. If so, this promotes the spirit of volunteerism, as well as partnership.

Uses and contents of newsletters. Just as newsletters can be formatted in a number of ways, they can serve many purposes. Some teachers send home a weekly, biweekly, or monthly newsletter for informing parents of classroom activities, projects, field trips, and so forth. Major topics of study, concepts, skills, titles of books, due dates for assignments, and other important information can be shared as well. In many classrooms, students routinely contribute to the classroom newsletter by writing news articles about classroom or school

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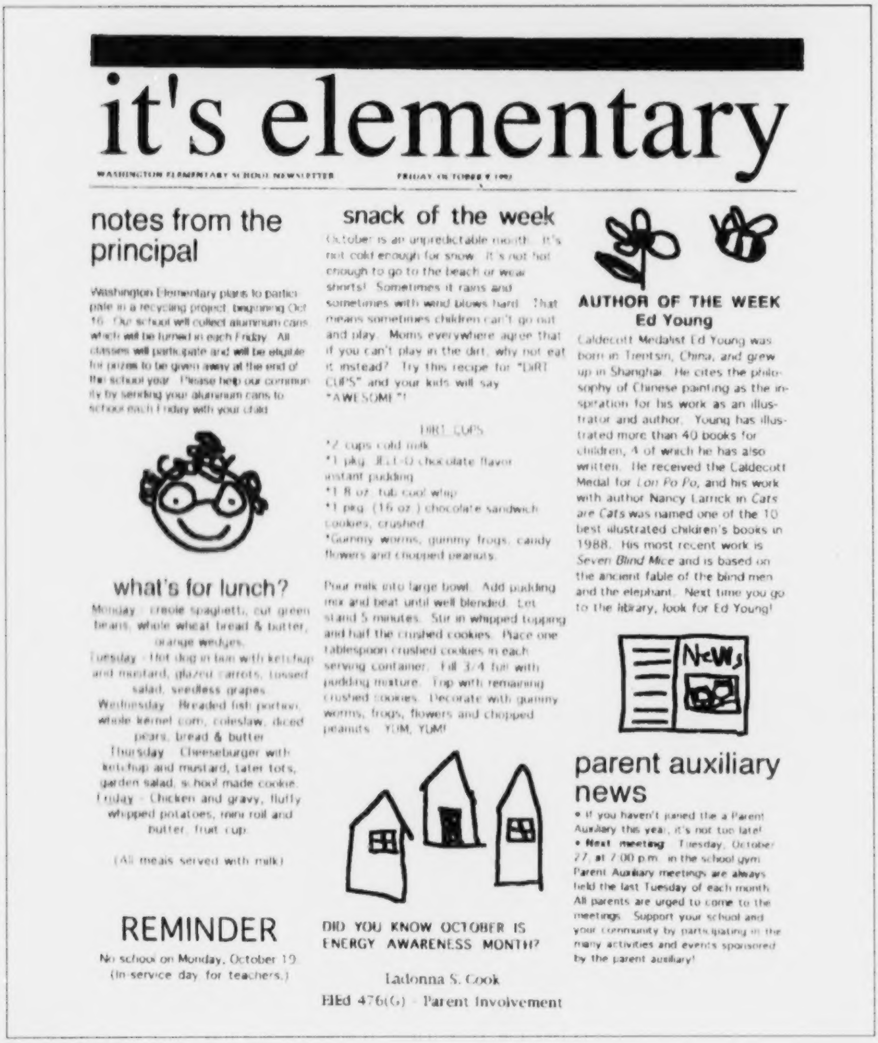


it's elementary

WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NEWSLETTER FRIDAY OCTOBER 9 1992

notes from the principal

Washington Elementary plans to participate in a recycling project, beginning Oct 16. Our school will collect aluminum cans which will be turned in each Friday. All classes will participate and will be eligible for prizes to be given away at the end of the school year. Please help our community by sending your aluminum cans to school each Friday with your child.

what's for lunch?

Monday - creole spaghetti, cut green beans, whole wheat bread & butter, orange wedges.
Tuesday - Hot dog in bun with ketchup and mustard, glazed carrots, tossed salad, seedless grapes.
Wednesday - Breaded fish portion, whole kernel corn, coleslaw, diced pears, bread & butter
Thursday - Cheeseburger with ketchup and mustard, tater tots, garden salad, school made cookie.
Friday - Chicken and gravy, fluffy whipped potatoes, mini roll and butter, fruit cup.

(All meals served with milk)

REMINDER

No school on Monday, October 19.
(In-service day for teachers.)

snack of the week

October is an unpredictable month. It's not cold enough for snow. It's not hot enough to go to the beach or wear shorts! Sometimes it rains and sometimes the wind blows hard. That means sometimes children can't go out and play. Moms everywhere agree that if you can't play in the dirt, why not eat it instead? Try this recipe for "DIRT CUPS" and your kids will say "AWESOME"!

DIRT CUPS

*2 cups cold milk
*1 pkg. JELL-O chocolate flavor instant pudding
*1 8 oz. tub cool whip
*1 pkg. (16 oz.) chocolate sandwich cookies, crushed
*Gummy worms, gummy frogs, candy flowers and chopped peanuts.

Pour milk into large bowl. Add pudding mix and beat until well blended. Let stand 5 minutes. Stir in whipped topping and half the crushed cookies. Place one tablespoon crushed cookies in each serving container. Fill 3/4 full with pudding mixture. Top with remaining crushed cookies. Decorate with gummy worms, frogs, flowers and chopped peanuts. YUM, YUM!

DID YOU KNOW OCTOBER IS ENERGY AWARENESS MONTH?

Ladonna S. Cook
ElEd 476(G) - Parent Involvement

AUTHOR OF THE WEEK
Ed Young

Caldecott Medalist Ed Young was born in Tientsin, *China*, and grew up in Shanghai. He cites the philosophy of Chinese painting as the inspiration for his work as an illustrator and author. Young has illustrated more than 40 books for children, 4 of which he has also written. He received the Caldecott Medal for *Lon Po Po*, and his work with author Nancy Larrick in *Cats are Cats* was named one of the 10 best illustrated children's books in 1988. His most recent work is *Seven Blind Mice* and is based on the ancient fable of the blind men and the elephant. Next time you go to the library, look for Ed Young!

parent auxiliary news

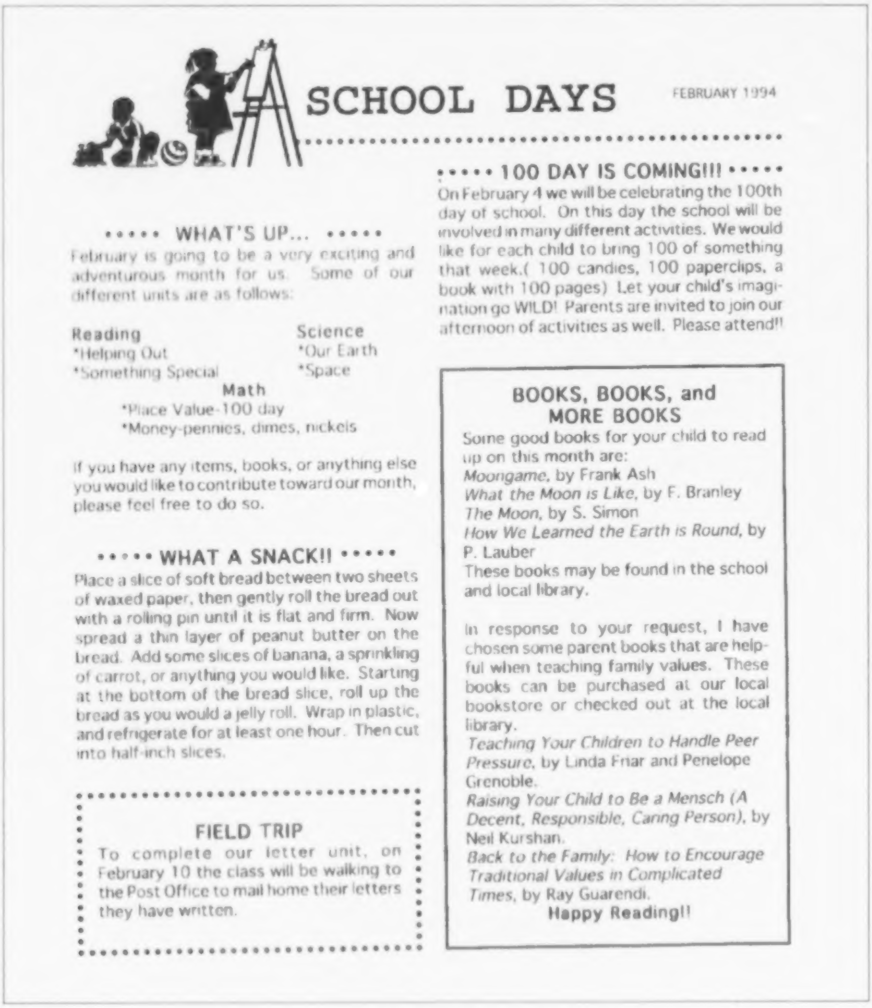
- If you haven't joined the a Parent Auxiliary this year, it's not too late!
- **Next meeting** Tuesday, October 27, at 7:00 p.m. in the school gym. Parent Auxiliary meetings are always held the last Tuesday of each month. All parents are urged to come to the meetings. Support your school and your community by participating in the many activities and events sponsored by the parent auxiliary!

Figure 4.5

events, or by sharing original poems, short stories, and/or reports. Using parents as audiences often motivates children to produce better products. And having student work appear in the newsletter helps give parents a sense of what other children are doing in the classroom and makes parents more aware of what is expected of the students in terms of writing. Sometimes upper-grade students assume full, or almost full, responsibility for planning, writing, editing, and publishing the newsletter. In these classrooms the teacher usually has a "From the teacher . . ." column in each edition.

Some teachers use the classroom newsletter, or certain portions of it, as a vehicle for sharing strategies that parents could use to help their children learn. Study tips for spelling, a strategy for how to help when a child comes to an unknown word in reading, notetaking strategies, and so on provide valuable information aimed at helping parents help their own children. In the newsletter shown in Figure 4.6, Brenda Albright has included the recipe for a nutritious snack and a list of books for at-home reading. Attached to Brenda's newsletter was a "parent send-home" page from *Scholastic Pre-K Today* that included hints and recipes for encouraging tactile play and creativity in young children (see Figure 4.7).

Other content suggestions for classroom newsletters include current achievements of students, reminders of school rules and procedures, notes about class curricular goals, and parent follow-up activities, photographs, and "want ads," or a list of supplies needed for special projects. Specialized handouts prepared for parents and suggestions for parent/child home-learning activi-



SCHOOL DAYS

FEBRUARY 1994

••••• 100 DAY IS COMING!!! •••••

On February 4 we will be celebrating the 100th day of school. On this day the school will be involved in many different activities. We would like for each child to bring 100 of something that week.(100 candies, 100 paperclips, a book with 100 pages) Let your child's imagination go WILD! Parents are invited to join our afternoon of activities as well. Please attend!!

••••• WHAT'S UP... •••••

February is going to be a very exciting and adventurous month for us. Some of our different units are as follows:

Reading
*Helping Out
*Something Special

Science
*Our Earth
*Space

Math
*Place Value-100 day
*Money-pennies, dimes, nickels

If you have any items, books, or anything else you would like to contribute toward our month, please feel free to do so.

••••• WHAT A SNACK!! •••••

Place a slice of soft bread between two sheets of waxed paper, then gently roll the bread out with a rolling pin until it is flat and firm. Now spread a thin layer of peanut butter on the bread. Add some slices of banana, a sprinkling of carrot, or anything you would like. Starting at the bottom of the bread slice, roll up the bread as you would a jelly roll. Wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for at least one hour. Then cut into half-inch slices.

FIELD TRIP

To complete our letter unit, on February 10 the class will be walking to the Post Office to mail home their letters they have written.

BOOKS, BOOKS, and MORE BOOKS

Some good books for your child to read up on this month are:
Moongame, by Frank Ash
What the Moon is Like, by F. Branley
The Moon, by S. Simon
How We Learned the Earth is Round, by P. Lauber
These books may be found in the school and local library.

In response to your request, I have chosen some parent books that are helpful when teaching family values. These books can be purchased at our local bookstore or checked out at the local library.
Teaching Your Children to Handle Peer Pressure, by Linda Friar and Penelope Grenoble.
Raising Your Child to Be a Mensch (A Decent, Responsible, Caring Person), by Neil Kurshan.
Back to the Family: How to Encourage Traditional Values in Complicated Times, by Ray Guarendi.
Happy Reading!!

Figure 4.6

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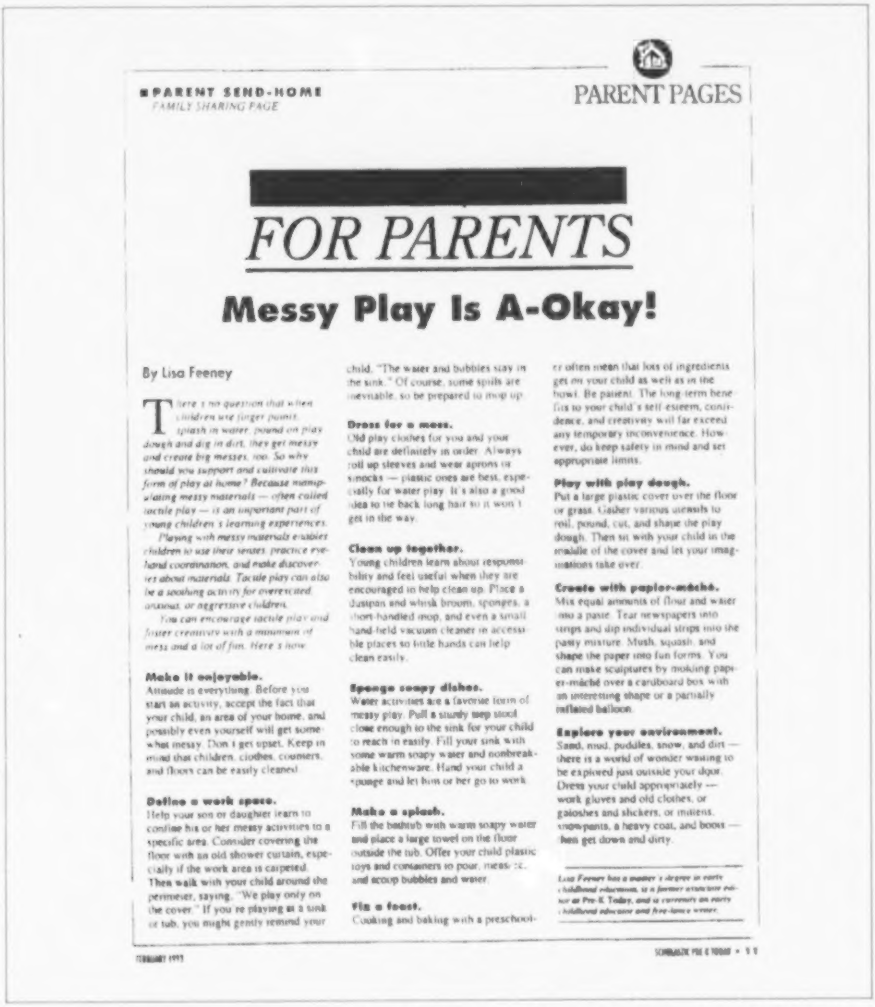
ties always make good attachments and can also be used to fill up any blank pages when the newsletter is photocopied back-to-back.

An alternative to the traditional classroom newsletter comes from Baskwill (1992), who designed "Ask Me About"—a newsletter for the parents of the children in her early childhood class. Since parents have many questions about school (such as "What did you do today?") and children typically respond with "Nothing" (or worse yet "We just played") Baskwill developed a newsletter designed to give parents "insider's information" so they would know which questions to ask of their children. Before sending home each weekly newsletter, Baskwill discusses it with the children so they leave expecting to discuss school activities with their family members. An "Ask Me About" section could



PARENT SEND-HOME
FAMILY SHARING PAGE

PARENT PAGES

[redacted]

FOR PARENTS

Messy Play Is A-Okay!

By Lisa Feeney

There's no question that when children use finger paint, splash in water, pound on play dough and dig in dirt, they get messy and create big messes, too. So why should you support and cultivate this form of play at home? Because manipulating messy materials — often called tactile play — is an important part of young children's learning experiences.

Playing with messy materials enables children to use their senses, practice eye-hand coordination, and make discoveries about materials. Tactile play can also be a soothing activity for overexcited, anxious, or aggressive children.

You can encourage tactile play and foster creativity with a minimum of mess and a lot of fun. Here's how.

Make it enjoyable.
Attitude is everything. Before you start an activity, accept the fact that your child, an area of your home, and possibly even yourself will get somewhat messy. Don't get upset. Keep in mind that children, clothes, counters, and floors can be easily cleaned!

Define a work space.
Help your son or daughter learn to confine his or her messy activities to a specific area. Consider covering the floor with an old shower curtain, especially if the work area is carpeted. Then walk with your child around the perimeter, saying, "We play only on the cover." If you're playing at a sink or tub, you might gently remind your child, "The water and bubbles stay in the sink." Of course, some spills are inevitable, so be prepared to mop up.

Dress for a mess.
Old play clothes for you and your child are definitely in order. Always roll up sleeves and wear aprons or smocks — plastic ones are best, especially for water play. It's also a good idea to tie back long hair so it won't get in the way.

Clean up together.
Young children learn about responsibility and feel useful when they are encouraged to help clean up. Place a dustpan and whisk broom, sponges, a short-handled mop, and even a small hand-held vacuum cleaner in accessible places so little hands can help clean easily.

Sponge soapy dishes.
Water activities are a favorite form of messy play. Pull a sturdy step stool close enough to the sink for your child to reach in easily. Fill your sink with some warm soapy water and nonbreakable kitchenware. Hand your child a sponge and let him or her go to work.

Make a splash.
Fill the bathtub with warm soapy water and place a large towel on the floor outside the tub. Offer your child plastic toys and containers to pour, measure, and scoop bubbles and water.

Fix a feast.
Cooking and baking with a preschooler often mean that lots of ingredients get on your child as well as in the bowl. Be patient. The long-term benefits to your child's self-esteem, confidence, and creativity will far exceed any temporary inconvenience. However, do keep safety in mind and set appropriate limits.

Play with play dough.
Put a large plastic cover over the floor or grass. Gather various utensils to roll, pound, cut, and shape the play dough. Then sit with your child in the middle of the cover and let your imaginations take over.

Create with papier-mâché.
Mix equal amounts of flour and water into a paste. Tear newspapers into strips and dip individual strips into the pasty mixture. Mush, squash, and shape the paper into fun forms. You can make sculptures by molding papier-mâché over a cardboard box with an interesting shape or a partially inflated balloon.

Explore your environment.
Sand, mud, puddles, snow, and dirt — there is a world of wonder waiting to be explored just outside your door. Dress your child appropriately — work gloves and old clothes, or galoshes and slickers, or mittens, snowpants, a heavy coat, and boots — then get down and dirty.

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FEBRUARY 1993

SCHOLASTIC PRE-K TODAY • 11

Figure 4.7. From *Scholastic Pre-K Today,* p. 11, Feb. 1993. Copyright © 1993 by Scholastic Inc. Reprinted by permission.

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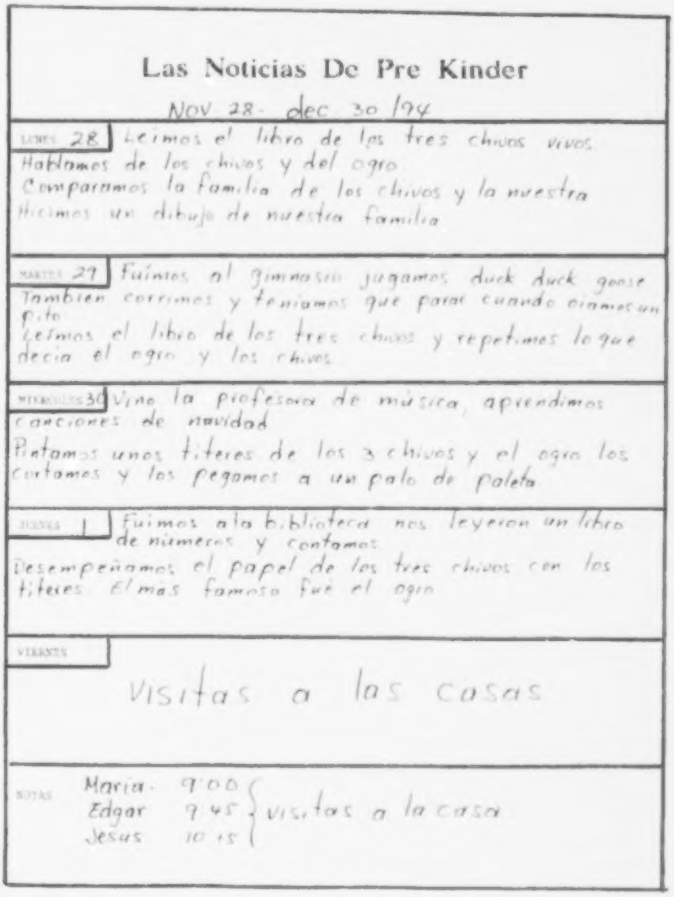
be a regular feature of any classroom newsletter and one that parents would probably look forward to reading.

Some classroom teachers record daily "happenings" to inform parents about the curricular activities. In Figure 4.8 is an example of one such newsletter sent home weekly by Linda Houck, a bilingual prekindergarten classroom teacher at Ericsson School in Moline, Illinois.

School newsletters. In addition to sending home classroom newsletters, many schools also send home a school newsletter to promote a strong school spirit and a sense of "community" within the families. The principal generally has a column or letter to the parents. Also included in the school newsletter is a calendar of upcoming events and information about parent organizations, committees, or advisory groups. Original writings or artwork created by the students and short, informative articles on high-interest topics such as health and nutrition, learning strategies, and developmental milestones are also often



Las Noticias De Pre Kinder

Nov 28 - dec 30 /94

LUNES 28 Leimos el libro de los tres chivos vivos
Hablamos de los chivos y del ogro
Comparamos la familia de los chivos y la nuestra
Hicimos un dibujo de nuestra familia

MARTES 29 Fuimos al gimnasio jugamos duck duck goose
Tambien corrimos y teniamos que parar cuando oiamos un pito
Leimos el libro de los tres chivos y repetimos lo que decia el ogro y los chivos

MIERCOLES 30 Vino la profesora de música, aprendimos canciones de navidad
Pintamos unos titeres de los 3 chivos y el ogro los cortamos y los pegamos a un palo de paleta

JUEVES 1 Fuimos a la biblioteca nos leyeron un libro de numeros y contamos
Desempeñamos el papel de los tres chivos con los titeres. El mas famoso fue el ogro

VIERNES

Visitas a las casas

NOTAS
Maria 9:00
Edgar 9:45 } visitas a la casa
Jesus 10:15

Figure 4.8

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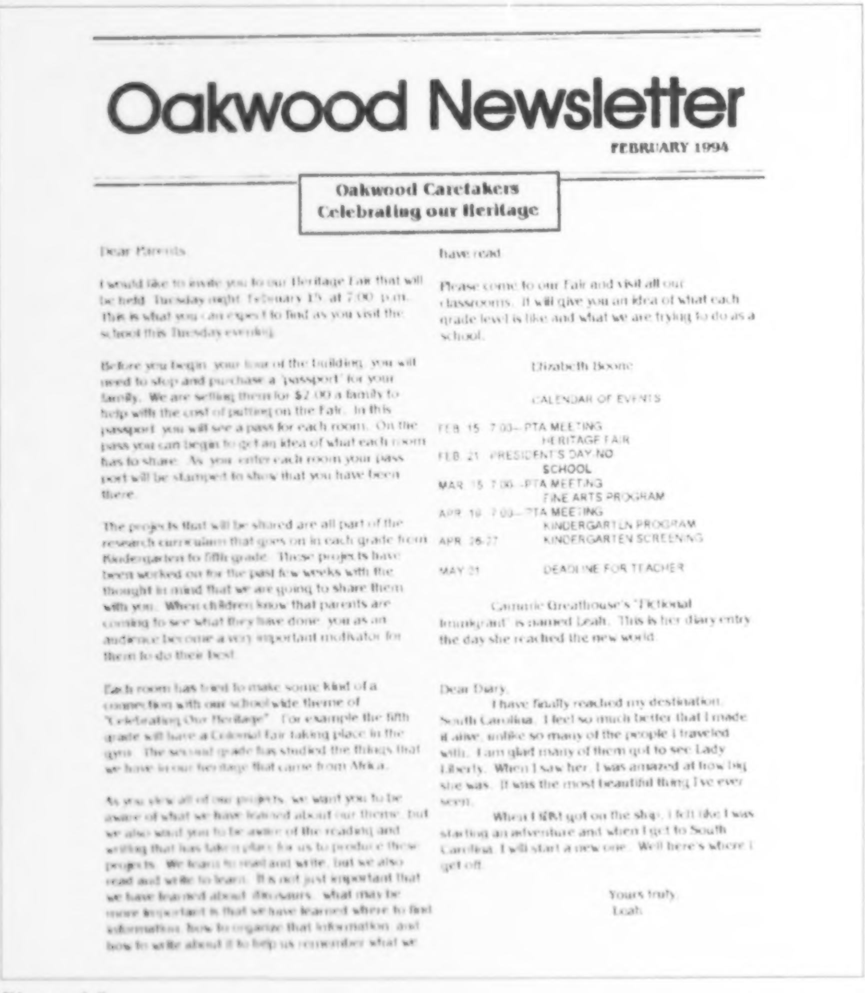
included. Included also are samples of students' work and some mention of classroom activities, which helps to broaden family awareness of the schoolwide program and serves to acquaint family members with teachers and classrooms other than the ones their children are enrolled in.

On page 1 of the *Oakwood Newsletter* (shown in Figure 4.9), the schoolwide theme for the 1993–94 school year, "Oakwood Caretakers Celebrating our Heritage," appears under the masthead. The letter from the principal includes an invitation to the "Heritage Fair" and a description of the curricular activities that led up to this event. Families are informed about not only *what* the students have studied but also *why*: "It's not just important that we have learned about dinosaurs; what may be more important is that we have learned where to find information, how to organize that information, and how to write about it to help us remember what we have read."



Oakwood Newsletter

FEBRUARY 1994

Oakwood Caretakers
Celebrating our Heritage

Dear Parents

I would like to invite you to our Heritage Fair that will be held Tuesday night February 15 at 7:00 p.m. This is what you can expect to find as you visit the school this Tuesday evening.

Before you begin your tour of the building, you will need to stop and purchase a "passport" for your family. We are selling them for $2.00 a family to help with the cost of putting on the Fair. In this passport you will see a pass for each room. On the pass you can begin to get an idea of what each room has to share. As you enter each room your passport will be stamped to show that you have been there.

The projects that will be shared are all part of the research curriculum that goes on in each grade from Kindergarten to fifth grade. These projects have been worked on for the past few weeks with the thought in mind that we are going to share them with you. When children know that parents are coming to see what they have done, you as an audience become a very important motivator for them to do their best.

Each room has tried to make some kind of a connection with our schoolwide theme of "Celebrating Our Heritage". For example the fifth grade will have a Colonial Fair taking place in the gym. The second grade has studied the things that we have in our heritage that came from Africa.

As you view all of our projects, we want you to be aware of what we have learned about our theme, but we also want you to be aware of the reading and writing that has taken place for us to produce these projects. We learn to read and write, but we also read and write to learn. It is not just important that we have learned about dinosaurs, what may be more important is that we have learned where to find information, how to organize that information, and how to write about it to help us remember what we have read.

Please come to our Fair and visit all our classrooms. It will give you an idea of what each grade level is like and what we are trying to do as a school.

Elizabeth Boone

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEB. 15 7:00—PTA MEETING
HERITAGE FAIR
FEB. 21 PRESIDENT'S DAY-NO
SCHOOL
MAR. 15 7:00—PTA MEETING
FINE ARTS PROGRAM
APR. 19 7:00—PTA MEETING
KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM
APR. 26-27 KINDERGARTEN SCREENING

MAY 31 DEADLINE FOR TEACHER

Cammie Greathouse's "Fictional Immigrant" is named Leah. This is her diary entry the day she reached the new world.

Dear Diary,

I have finally reached my destination, South Carolina. I feel so much better that I made it alive, unlike so many of the people I traveled with. I am glad many of them got to see Lady Liberty. When I saw her, I was amazed at how big she was. It was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

When I first got on the ship, I felt like I was starting an adventure and when I get to South Carolina I will start a new one. Well here's where I get off.

Yours truly,
Leah

Figure 4.9

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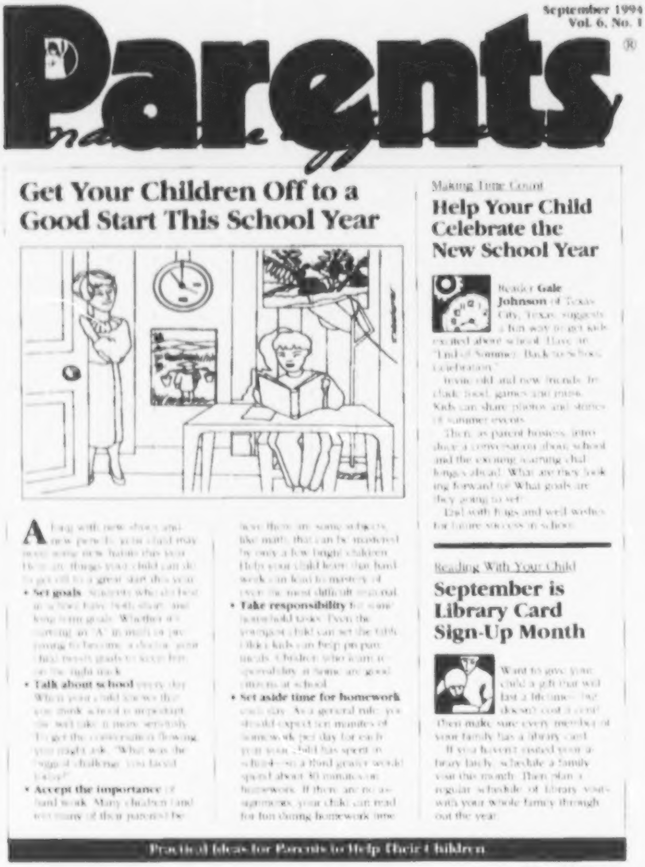

September 1994
Vol. 6, No. 1

Parents ®

Get Your Children Off to a Good Start This School Year

Making Time Count

Help Your Child Celebrate the New School Year

Reading With Your Child

September is Library Card Sign-Up Month

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children

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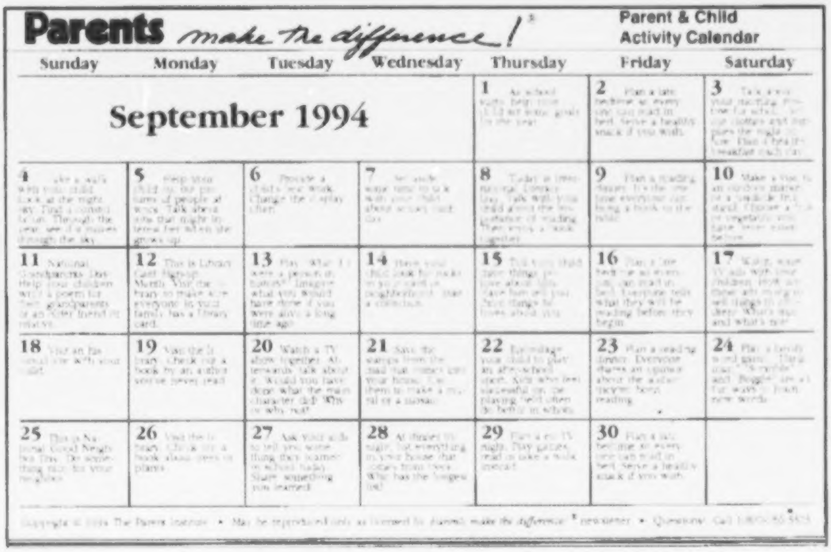
Figure 4.10

Commercial newsletters. There are several commercial parent newsletters that can be purchased in bulk for distribution to parents. Although they generally contain good information, we caution schools not to use them as *substitutes* for a classroom or school newsletter, because commercial newsletters do not project an image unique to your particular school or classroom. The fact that they are mass produced is clearly evident to the parents who receive them. Secondly, they do not include the kinds of personal information that entices many parents to actually read the newsletter. Finally, if a commercial newsletter is the *only* regularly written communication device, the message to parents may be that school staff think that parent involvement is something that can be *purchased* or that school staff members do not have the time, expertise, or desire to develop their own personal communications to parents.



Parents make the difference!

Parent & Child Activity Calendar

September 1994

Figure 4.11

Having issued these cautions, there are several good commercially available parent communication tools that could be used effectively. For example, the Parent Institute publishes *Parents make the difference!*, monthly newsletters with educational articles and practical ideas for parents to help their children. Two newsletters, a grades K–6 edition and a grades 7–12 edition, are available in English and Spanish. The Parent Institute also has an individual subscription rate that allows the use of up to four articles per issue in a school's own newsletter or other parent materials. This allows a school staff to take advantage of well-written articles and at the same time to create their own newsletter, one which conveys a warm and *personal* message uniquely suited to their audience and to their particular school situation. In Figure 4.10 is an example of page 1 of the September 1994 K–6 edition of *Parents make the difference!* (For ordering information, contact The Parent Institute at P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, Virginia 22039-7474, or call toll-free: 1-800-756-5525.) The Parent Institute also publishes monthly activity calendars with parent/child interaction ideas for daily home-learning (see Figure 4.11). Some classroom teachers develop similar calendars with activities that reflect the learning taking place in that room. These types of calendars have also been created and disseminated by such districts as the Indianapolis, Indiana, Public Schools and by state departments of education, such as the one in Louisiana.

Finally, when considering an appropriate length for a newsletter, one sheet printed both front and back is a good length for a weekly newsletter. For monthly newsletters, two pages of paper printed on front and back of each, for a total of four pages, is generally sufficient. If newsletters will be mailed to any of the families or community members, you may want to consider leav-

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ing the back page blank for affixing an address label. If no newsletters are to be mailed, or if envelopes will be used, then our preference is that ***no blank pages be included.*** On blank pages or half-pages, you might consider including a list of suggested books, video and movie reviews, or additional samples of students' work.

Printing and Distribution

Printing and distributing classroom and school newsletters require careful consideration. Once the time and effort have been expended to create a good newsletter, you want to do everything you can to ensure that it will be read by the target audience. Some teachers and schools drastically reduce the chances that parents will read the newsletter by duplicating it in a sloppy or difficult-to-read way. Use of too-bright or fluorescent paper, too-small print size, ditto-machine duplication, dot-matrix printers, or photocopying that is too light, all reduce the readability and diminish the effectiveness of the newsletter. A black-line copier provides the best results, and use of the same-color paper for each newsletter—a color that is not hard on the eyes—increases recognizability. Access to a copier that allows reductions is helpful since students' work can often be reduced several times without sacrificing quality or readability. Finally, before the newsletter is printed, be sure to have it proofread. Even the most careful writers make typos! Most newsletters, both classroom and school newsletters, are typically sent home with the students. Increase the chances that the newsletters will reach the parents by sending home the newsletters on the same day of each week or month. In the initial communications—the handbook, Open House, parent meeting—let parents know when to expect the newsletter and the procedure that will be used for distribution. Parents will come to look for the newsletter if they expect it to arrive home with their child each Monday or Friday or first school day of a new month, for example. Having deadlines helps keep teachers and principals from letting this particular commitment slide by without completion, an added benefit to establishing a regular distribution schedule.

Some schools send home the newsletters in a laminated brown envelope. Inside the envelope is a sign-off sheet for parents' signatures, indicating receipt of the newsletter. Such a procedure takes some initial planning and setup costs, but it does result in more newsletters getting into the hands of the parents. Few schools mail newsletters to students' homes, for the obvious reasons of cost. Exceptions do exist, and one in particular bears mentioning. As we discussed in previous chapters, the family structure today is very different from that of several years ago. Large numbers of children in each school have two families—and in two homes. Whether or not the parents have a joint-custody arrangement (unless extenuating circumstances as a court order prohibiting or severely limiting visitation exist), *both* parents should be given the opportunity to receive information from the school, including classroom and school newsletters. Oftentimes the child or custodial parent is expected to photocopy information and share it with the noncustodial parent. This is difficult, especially if the parents are experiencing communications problems or if one parent lives in another town. Since additional costs are involved, some teachers and schools issue an invitation for parents in this situation to pay a fee to cover the added costs. Other schools ask that noncustodial parents send self-addressed, stamped envelopes for mailing newsletters and other communication.

School newsletters should also be disseminated to members of the central office staff and the school board. Staff and board members need to know the efforts being made at your school to foster good relations with parents through increased communication. Reading your school newsletter will also give central office staff and school board members important "inside information" about the beneficial activities taking place at your school.

Regular distribution of the school newsletter to key businesses, social and religious organizations, government or private social service agencies, and other schools in the area is a worthwhile expenditure. Since the majority of community members may not have children in school, the school newsletter can function as an important public relations tool. Furthermore, sending the newsletter to radio and television stations and to the local newspapers may result in increased coverage for your school events and activities. Any opportunity to increase the public's awareness and knowledge of public education should not be overlooked. *Share the good news!*

Evaluating Newsletters

It is a good idea to conduct a periodic evaluation of the newsletters sent home. One way to do this is to send home a brief survey in one of your school newsletters. Asking parents if the newsletter is meeting their needs not only conveys respect for parents' opinions but also lets them know that you are willing to make adjustments that will result in better communication. Asking whether the adults *read* the newsletter, as well as asking about the frequency of publication, method of distribution, ease of readability, and helpfulness of content will give you important information and direction for future change. A sample survey is included in Figure 4.12.

SUMMARY

Even though the communication flow is primarily one-way, the advantages of sending home newsletters on at least a monthly basis are far-reaching. A carefully constructed newsletter sends a very positive message to parents and helps them feel confident that the teacher and school staff are knowledgeable and organized. Newsletters serve a variety of purposes, including keeping parents up-to-date about school events and programs, sharing strategies for home-learning, and reporting classroom news.

Time required for constructing letters and newsletters can be kept to a minimum through the use of computers and desktop-publishing software with newsletter options. Advance consideration of newsletter format, color of paper, readability factors, and content to be included greatly increase the probability that the newsletter will be well-received by parents and also reduce time needed for developing subsequent newsletters. In Figure 4.13 is a checklist that may prove helpful as you evaluate your school or classroom newsletter.

Please tell us what you think . . .

Our school newsletter is one tool we use to keep you informed about school events and programs and involved in your child's education. We want this tool to be as effective as possible. Would you please take a few moments to share with us your opinions about our newsletter?

1. Do you receive each monthly edition of the newsletter?
   Yes No Sometimes
   Comment:

2. Do you read each newsletter?
   Yes No Sometimes
   Comment:

3. Do you think our newsletter is published
   Too often Not often Often enough
   Comment:

4. Is our newsletter easy to read?
   Yes No Sometimes
   Comment:

5. Does our newsletter keep you informed about school events and activities?
   Yes No Sometimes
   Comment:

6. Does our newsletter provide you with helpful ideas to try at home with your child?
   Yes No Sometimes
   Comment:

7. How could our newsletter be more helpful for you?
   Comment:

Figure 4.12

NEWSLETTER EVALUATION FORM

Consider each criterion, then rate your newsletter from 1 (low) to 5 (high) on each item. Have two or more individuals rate the same newsletter, then compare and discuss your ratings and arrive at a consensus for each. List ways to improve those criteria not rated a 5.

Format

- Simple, attractive masthead or heading with name and date
  1 2 3 4 5
- Good layout with two or three columns
  1 2 3 4 5
- Ample space between entries
  1 2 3 4 5
- Type or print size not too small—easy to read
  1 2 3 4 5
- Good choice of paper color—not hard on the eyes, yet will stand out
  1 2 3 4 5
- Good use of attractive graphics
  1 2 3 4 5
- Appropriate use of headings and subheadings for each entry
  1 2 3 4 5
- High-quality reproduction
  1 2 3 4 5
- Appropriate length—one or two pages and printed on both sides of the paper
  1 2 3 4 5

Content

- Includes calendar of upcoming events
  1 2 3 4 5
- Includes sufficient "news" about school programs and activities
  1 2 3 4 5
- Includes helpful home-learning strategies and parent education information/ideas
  1 2 3 4 5
- Includes samples of student work, as appropriate
  1 2 3 4 5

Figure 4.13 *(Continued on next page)*

Style

- Entries are written in language appropriate for intended audience
  1 2 3 4 5
- Entries are written in simple, direct language
  1 2 3 4 5
- Newsletter conveys a warm, personal tone
  1 2 3 4 5
- Newsletter is free of spelling and/or grammatical errors
  1 2 3 4 5

Dissemination

- Provisions are made for translation of newsletter into languages other than English, as needed
  1 2 3 4 5
- Newsletter is disseminated on the same day of each week or month
  1 2 3 4 5
- Newsletter is made available to joint custody and non-custodial parents
  1 2 3 4 5
- Newsletter is disseminated to local media, key businesses, social service and religious organizations, government service agencies
  1 2 3 4 5
- Newsletter is disseminated to members of the central office staff and the school board
  1 2 3 4 5
- Measures are taken to increase the probability that all parents receive the newsletter (i.e., sending home in a brown envelope, having a sign-off sheet for parents)
  1 2 3 4 5

Evaluation

- Periodic evaluation of the newsletter is conducted
  1 2 3 4 5
- Feedback from evaluations is shared with entire school staff
  1 2 3 4 5
- Evaluation data are used to make revisions that will increase the quality and/or effectiveness of the newsletter
  1 2 3 4 5

Figure 4.13 *(continued)*

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Sometimes principals have to initiate effort on the part of teachers. Publishing a school newsletter is one way that principals can communicate to teachers, as well as to parents, the importance of effective newsletters in gaining parental involvement. Our Oakwood Newsletter *helps to create a climate of community that permeates the school and extends to each students' family.*

The questions that follow have been designed to help you think about the major points conveyed in this chapter. The answers you give may help you determine whether or not the newsletters in your school are a true reflection of your beliefs.

For your consideration . . .

1. Each teacher should convey to parents the expectations and goals of the classroom, as well as routine procedures, and special projects or assignments.
   Yes/No
2. A school newsletter helps to promote a strong school spirit and a sense of "community" within the families.
   Yes/No
3. Newsletters serve a variety of purposes, including keeping parents up-to-date about school events and programs, sharing strategies for home-learning, and reporting classroom news.
   Yes/No
4. School leaders should help teachers reduce the time required for constructing letters and newsletters by making available computers and desktop-publishing software with newsletter options.
   Yes/No
5. In the case of blended families, when at all possible both parents should be given the opportunity to receive information from the school, including classroom and school newsletters.
   Yes/No
6. Using parents as audiences via school and classroom newsletters often motivates children to do better.
   Yes/No
7. Having students' work appear in the newsletter helps give parents a sense of what other children are doing in the classroom and makes parents more aware of what is expected of the students in terms of writing.
   Yes/No
8. It is a good idea to conduct a periodic evaluation of the newsletters sent home by the school staff.
   Yes/No

REFERENCE

Baskwill, J. 1992. Ask me about: A newsletter with a difference. *Teaching K–8* 22 (8): 44–45.

Chapter 5

Getting to Know You . . . Open Houses and Parent Programs

A note from Kathy . . .
When we received the invitation for the school's annual Open House, I couldn't help being less than enthused. I anticipated the typical routine . . . a brief smile and "hello" to the principal and teacher . . . a quick look at the room . . . a few murmured greetings to fellow parents . . . and a cookie from the table set up in the school gym. WOW! Was I surprised! When we entered the hallway that led to Mrs. Breheny's kindergarten room we were greeted warmly and asked to participate in the graphing activities that were posted on the hallway walls. One graph directed the children to find the clothespin with their name written on it and place it on either the "Yes" or "No" section of a circle graph that asked the question "Do you like bugs?" When we entered the room, the teacher greeted us warmly and explained that the room was set up into learning centers similar to the ones the children would use in kindergarten. The first theme study, bugs, was reflected in the activities currently displayed in each center. We were to visit each center, read the parent information that described the purpose for each center, and participate with our child in the activity. For about forty-five minutes we counted plastic bugs and graphed the total at the math center, constructed playdough creatures at the art center (and also picked up the recipe and volunteered to bring the playdough for the month of December), wrote at the writing center, and listened to a story in the book and listening area. At the end of the hour we had a much clearer idea of the daily routine and had been well-acquainted with not only what our child was learning that year but also why and how.

Too many times Open Houses become just what their name implies. The school is open for parents to walk through and exchange greetings and pleasantries with teachers. The bulletin boards are full and children's work is on display, but attitudes of both teachers and parents often reflect the effort expended on this event—halfhearted! Considered a duty by teachers and parents, even the enthusiasm from the children cannot overcome the fact that very little organization or planning has taken place. Unfortunately, the result is that parents come away with very little new information or insights about the school.

Some teachers, like the one described above, do engage in extensive planning before an Open House. With clear goals in mind they set about creating an atmosphere conducive to good parental involvement. And their efforts are rewarded as parents leave feeling as if they know more about the teacher, the classroom, and the program. These parents are more likely to be receptive to further involvement throughout the year. Camille Breheny, a kindergarten teacher at St. Paul School in Macomb, Illinois, is one such teacher. The Open House described in the opening paragraph was held only for new kindergarten students and their families prior to the first day of school. Later, when the rest of the school hosted their Open House, parents of the kindergarten children were surprised to see how their children had transformed the room. Original writing and works of art covered almost every available space. Displayed on the chart stand and on the front classroom wall were large charts with stories, classroom news, and questions dictated by the children. At each of the learning centers stood chairs covered with large—almost life-sized—creations resembling the children themselves. The children had painted their faces on paper plates and added yarn hair. Mrs. Breheny had taped each paper plate to a clothes hanger which was then attached to a child-sized chair. Finally, an "outgrown" shirt or dress sent from home was pulled over the coathanger and arranged to look as if the child were sitting in the chair. Each learning center was set up with materials that created the illusion of children seated in chairs working at the centers. After touring each center, parents received further information about the program and had an opportunity to view their child's work. This Open House, which sought to recreate the child's normal, everyday classroom environment, was a far cry from traditional ones where parents stood around an "almost too-clean-to-be-believed room" leafing through a stack of papers that had been placed on their child's desk.

Oakwood, like most schools, has had its share of these "walk through" Open Houses. However, in recent years the staff began to question the value of this annual activity as compared with other parent involvement activities planned throughout the year. The faculty were all in agreement: Something needed to be done. But what? Did they want to engage in the sort of goal setting and planning that would result in a more productive event? To be quite honest, had the teachers been asked if they wanted to continue to host an Open House, their response would have probably been "No." Enthusiasm and commitment had to be planted one teacher at a time before the faculty met as a whole to finalize goals and make plans.

A note from Elizabeth . . .

I've found that my enthusiasm and strong conviction for the valuable contributions that Open Houses can make serve to raise the energy level of teachers, children, and parents. We've worked hard to overcome the traditionally low expectations held of Open Houses. Our Open Houses involve goal setting, lots of planning, and lots of work. As a result, now every time *we have an Open House, both parents and teachers come away feeling as if something important has been accomplished.*

Hosting an Open House does generate a certain amount of stress. Some teachers naturally approach Open Houses and parent programs as they would a dinner party: *Everything must be perfect.* These teachers must be helped to realize that the emphasis must be on the *children* and *their* work. When the teacher has done the majority of the work in readying the room, it shows! Most parents have a pretty good idea of what their children are capable of doing on their own—and they know when they are viewing the teacher's work rather than that of the children. Worse still, children have very little ownership or interest in projects created largely by the teacher. Some teachers fear that parents will point out unconventional art or spelling—such as a painting of a blue tree by a kindergarten child—and think that the teacher is not doing a good job educating the children. These parents need to be helped to understand age-appropriate expectations and practices. Rather than cover up what the children are really capable of doing on their own, the teacher can use this opportunity to engage parents in informal conversations about the developmental appropriateness of the childrens' work. The teacher may also provide handouts that explain expectations for the children and methods used.

Having a goal—something you want to accomplish through the Open House—makes the event more beneficial for all concerned. For example, the first Open House of the school year at Oakwood School is held every September. It was traditionally a walk-through Open House called "Meet the Teacher" night. The attendance was usually good, but since the event was held early in the year, the teachers had had little time to get to know the students. As a result, the evening served little purpose other than for teachers to try to match a few names and faces. After much discussion and problem solving the faculty decided to change the emphasis of the event—along with a change in its name. For the past couple of years, Oakwood School has hosted a "Meet the Parents" night. The goal is to get to know the parents by having them talk and write about their children. Parents are encouraged to think and talk about their children's strengths and to set goals they believe their children need to pursue during the year. The first "Meet the Parents" night was very difficult, and teachers were generally disappointed in the lack of response from parents. Parents were not used to thinking in terms of their children's academic strengths and were hesitant to talk in front of other parents. The next year teachers created surveys and questionnaires that children could fill out with their parents during the Open House. As the children and their parents entered the room, they were greeted warmly by the teacher. They were then directed to the sheet of questions that had been placed on each child's desk. Parents would sit with their children to discuss questions such as "What are your child's strongest academic areas?"; "Does your child ever sit down and read by himself/herself?"; "Does your child engage in writing activities at home?"; and "What are your child's interests?" Other questions were designed to find out about the child's particular learning styles. Usually a parent read the question and then discussed it with the child. Then, either parent or child wrote the answer. The questions made parents stop to think about their children's development and helped parents begin to acquire the language they needed to discuss their children's academic strengths. As teachers walked around the room, they gained valuable knowledge about the parents and the children. At the end of the questionnaire was a place for parents to list, after corroborating with the child, areas of strength, as well as what they needed to work on during that year. Sometimes questions such as "What does your child need additional work on academically?" and "What should be your child's three main academic goals for the first nine weeks?" were included to prompt their responses. As a result of the changes that were made, teachers felt that the evening was very beneficial. Parents learned how important it is for them to share with the teacher what they know about their child. And, through the surveys, they became acquainted with what the teacher looked for in each student. The surveys became a source of discussion during the first parent-teacher conference held in October, and throughout the year they served as a reminder of goals set by the child and his or her parents.

Open Houses need not be reserved only for the start of the school year. At Oakwood School we generally host at least one other Open House where parents and children have an opportunity to visit all of the classrooms in the school. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Oakwood chooses a yearly schoolwide theme. The year that the theme was "Celebrating Our Heritage," a "Heritage Fair" was planned as an Open House. Since the heart of the school's curriculum is the children's involvement in research, it is important that families understand that *inquiry*—the process of generating questions about a topic and finding answers—does not evolve from traditional textbook study. Therefore, one of the goals of this particular Open House was to educate parents as to what the teachers were trying to accomplish through this teaching strategy. We knew that achieving this goal could best be done by sharing the process children engaged in throughout a theme study, so the Open House was planned at the end of a unit of study. By planning the date well in advance, children were able to share both the process and the end products—or projects.

It is important that Open Houses, programs, and events serve as an enhancement to instruction and not as an interruption or distraction. When an event such as an Open House is scheduled as a culminating event for a theme study, it becomes a very powerful motivator for children to produce their best work. As the date for the "Heritage Fair" approached, teachers and children planned their projects and exhibits—with assurance from the principal that what the children chose would work just fine. What was shared for the parents and community should be authentic to the curriculum and reflect what had been going on in the classroom.

While our yearly schoolwide theme does not replace state-mandated study in social studies and science, because of its broad nature, it does generally lend itself well to the majority of the required units. When the theme was "Celebrating Our Heritage," children in each classroom began early in the year to think about their past and to talk about what the central focus of their study and subsequent projects would be. A second goal for the Open House was to build a relationship with the community. Therefore, teachers worked to involve many people from the community as part of the study. The fifth grade was studying the American colonial period and decided they would tie in a study of the lifestyle of the people of that time and turn their exhibit into a folk life festival for the evening of the Open House. The three fifth-grade classes held their fair in the school library with booths where quilts, candles, bread, noodles, and spiced oranges were being made. Primitive tools, scrimshaw, a spinning wheel, and various kinds of needlework were all being demonstrated. (See Figures 5.1 to 5.3.) The research conducted by the students involved all of the crafts, and a committee was formed to develop a pamphlet to "advertise" each colony and encourage people to settle there. Representatives from the local Chamber of Commerce taught the children what information was needed in order to promote an area, and an assistant editor for the local newspaper taught them how to create a layout for their pamphlet.

Figure 5.1

Figure 5.2

Figure 5.3

The fourth-grade students were involved in a study of ecology, so they researched and shared the heritage we lose when nature is threatened. For the activity, fossils had been buried in plaster, and children "uncovered" the past at a table equipped with hammers and picks. On the evening of the Open House, results of their study of endangered plants and animals were shared, with the songs of whales as background music.

The third grade studied the history of Ellis Island and all the nationalities that came through the port. Their projects included a study of these people's cultures, their reasons for coming, and what they brought with them. Reports of the studies were displayed along with the flags and emblems from each country involved. Especially enticing were the samples of foods from each country, which were prepared by the students' parents and grandparents.

The second-grade classes were studying African folktales and the contributions of African-American culture to our heritage. Their study included contributions made in the areas of history, music, art, literature, and food.

The first grade studied the state in which they lived—Missouri—and what it was like before becoming a state. They conducted library research to find out about natural resources and interviewed parents, grandparents, and, in some cases, even great-grandparents to learn what life was like in earlier years. Children wrote biographies of their relatives' lives that included their memories about their own school days, important historical events, and generally what it was like in the past. These stories of "living history" were displayed during the Open House.

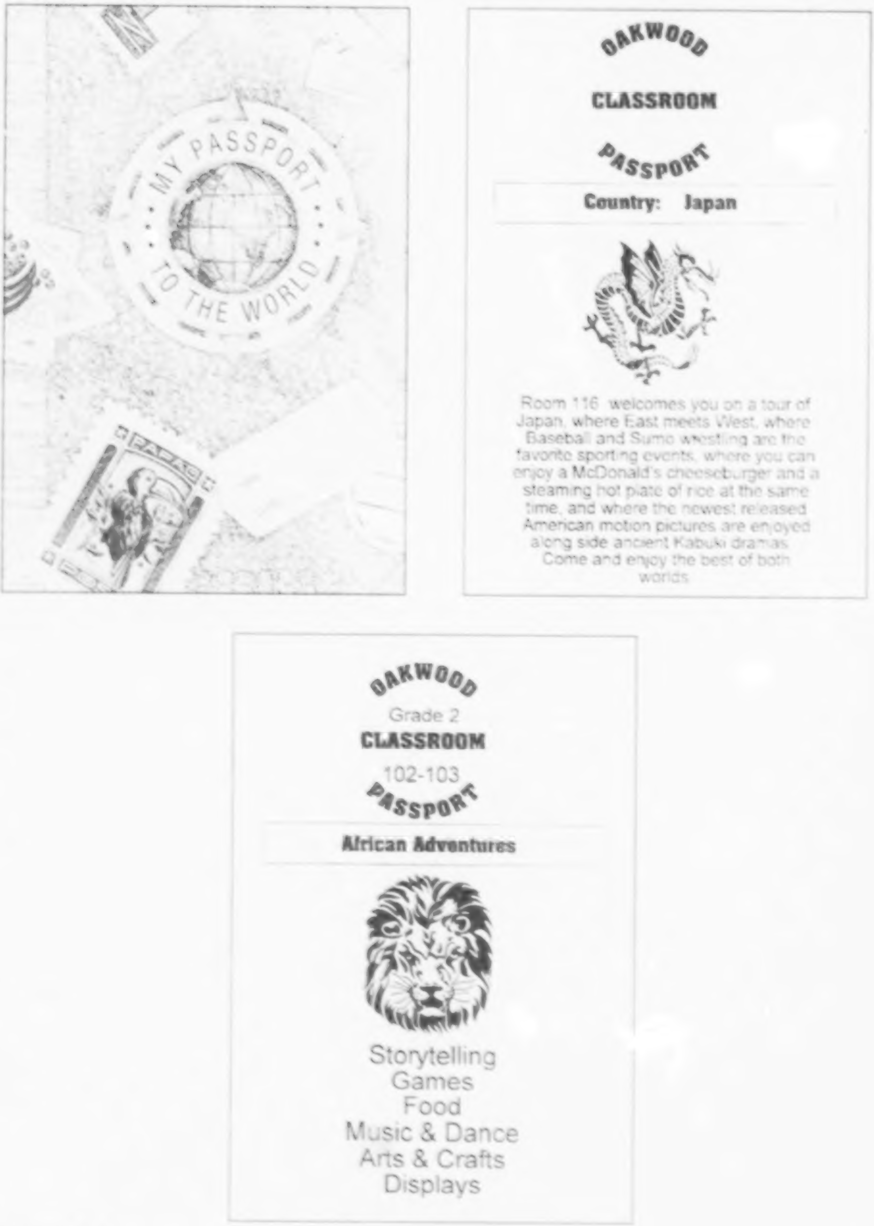
Even the kindergarten classes participated in the Heritage Fair. They had been learning about space and had no trouble displaying what the space program had contributed to our emerging heritage in the way of freezed-dried food, materials, and tales of extraterrestial life.

To bring all of the various classroom activities together and to encourage families to visit all rooms, we published a "passport" (see Figure 5.4) in which each grade had a page advertising its exhibit. Children were placed at each door to stamp the passports as families entered, and parents were encouraged by their children to get all pages stamped. The passports were sold at the main door for $2 per family to help defray the cost of the fair.

The Heritage Fair was very well-attended, mostly due to the children's enthusiasm. This enthusiasm was catching and caused families to stay and visit each classroom exhibit. Central office personnel and members of the community also visited the school that evening. Many of them had been involved during the study as guest speakers and in various classroom projects, so they had gained an insight into how much children learn when they are actively involved in the research process. Their comments were positive and centered around what our true goals are for elementary school children.

Parent Programs

Sometimes families of children in one particular grade or classroom may be


MY PASSPORT TO THE WORLD

OAKWOOD

CLASSROOM

PASSPORT

Country: Japan

Room 116 welcomes you on a tour of Japan, where East meets West, where Baseball and Sumo wrestling are the favorite sporting events, where you can enjoy a McDonald's cheeseburger and a steaming hot plate of rice at the same time, and where the newest released American motion pictures are enjoyed along side ancient Kabuki dramas. Come and enjoy the best of both worlds.

OAKWOOD
Grade 2
CLASSROOM
102-103
PASSPORT

African Adventures

Storytelling
Games
Food
Music & Dance
Arts & Crafts
Displays

Figure 5.4

invited to attend a meeting for purposes of sharing school programs and curriculum. In these situations the classroom has generally been involved in a theme study that is winding down. A part of all theme study involves discussion as to how the knowledge gained will be shared with others. A natural culminating event for a study involves inviting parents and others into the classroom to "show off" projects and stages through which children progressed to learn about and develop the projects. Sheila Shearer, a second-grade teacher in Macomb, Illinois, enjoys sharing with the children her experiences of growing up in Hawaii. The children learn a great deal about Hawaiian history, geography, language, people, and culture. They learn from Sheila and also by reading books, writing, and by exchanging monthly letters with pen pals in Hawaii. In their letters they ask several questions about life in Hawaii and answer questions their pen pals asked of them in their last letters. They also learn a big repertoire of Hawaiian songs, stick dances, and hula dances—all of which come together in a marvelous program complete with handmade leis, "grass" skirts, and musical instruments. Throughout the program children pause in their singing and dancing to talk about the various facts they have learned about Hawaii.

A program presented by kindergarten children at Oakwood School was a big hit among the parents. The children had researched and written or dictated reports about bears, cheetahs, and elephants. In conjunction with the P.E. teacher, they learned a number of animal games, songs, and dances. The children first presented their songs and dances, then read aloud their reports. The grand finale was an appearance by "little Tarzan!" The children were proud of their accomplishments, and the parents were quite impressed with how much their children had learned and could convey to others.

A final note about parent programs: No matter how hard you try to avoid scheduling conflicts, regardless of when parent programs take place, some parents simply cannot attend. Surveying parents to find out when they are most likely to be able to attend is a good idea. If there is no clear consensus, perhaps programs can be alternated between daytime and evening.

To further increase the probability that families will attend, consider sending invitations to special events. An invitation, unlike a flyer or announcement, conveys a more personal tone. Invitations can take many forms. Very nice invitations can be created with a desktop publishing program and then copied or printed for dissemination to large numbers of families. For smaller events, classroom teachers may want to fill out invitations purchased from greeting card companies. Students can also write their own invitations to their families. These are particularly effective in generating attendance at events where students' work will be displayed, such as an author's tea or science fair. Many teachers find that they get a particularly good response when the family member's names are included on the invitation and when they request an RSVP. Regardless of the occasion, an invitation conveys more than an announcement. It conveys a sincere desire to have the family represented at a special event.

For parents who must miss a program, the teachers at Oakwood have found that videotaping is a good alternative. Since most parents have access to a videoplayer—or are willing to rent one from a video store—most classroom programs are routinely videotaped for either checkout by parents, viewing by the children themselves, or for documenting student performance and growth over time. To help defray costs, a blank videocassette is on the supply list for each child. Parents have been very responsive to this medium for learning about what is happening in the classroom. Some teachers have even begun to videotape various in-classroom presentations and activities to which parents were not specially invited. These videos really help parents understand what goes on in the classroom—and as a result, parents are much more supportive.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have tried to demonstrate the importance of goal setting and planning for Open Houses. Through examples, we have illustrated a number of ways that Open Houses have served to foster positive relationships with families and community members. Although parents attending an Open House can sometimes learn strategies for helping their child at home, the primary purpose of an Open House is to communicate with others what children are doing and learning at school. In the next chapter, we will discuss a variety of strategies designed to help parents better fulfill their roles as parents and teachers. Particular emphasis will be placed on how to plan and deliver effective parent education workshops and meetings.

A note from Elizabeth . . .
After the Heritage Fair at Oakwood, I worried that the teachers would not be willing to even think about hosting another because of the time and effort that had been expended. My fear did not last long, because early the next day I received this note from our poet laureate, Carol Davis.

Teachers were tired,
Parents were inspired.
Kids shared,
Parent declared
IT'S A SUCCESS.
(But, oh what stress!)
Our parents counted 23
including little Robert's mommy.
Sheet skin and "cow fur"
the night was a blur.
Gave praises and no gripes.
Was it worth it? you say.
Glad you asked me today.
Best night yet?
YOU BET!!!

I knew that Carol reflected the feeling of the entire staff, and for weeks afterward we laughed about funny things that happened during the Heritage Fair. Plans for the next year's theme—"making dreams come true"—were already being made. Teachers could be heard talking by the water fountain, saying "we could do inventions," and "King Arthur's Round Table would be good." Success breeds success, and that one successful Open House planted many seeds.

Following is a list of questions relating to Open Houses and parent meetings. Answering these questions may help you begin to assess your own feelings and experiences with respect to traditional Open Houses and parent meetings.

For your consideration . . .

1. Information shared during Open Houses should be authentic for the curriculum and reflect what has been going on in the classroom.
   Yes/No
2. At the start of the school year, parents should be encouraged to think and talk about their children's strengths and to set goals they believe their children need to pursue during the year.
   Yes/No
3. Open Houses and parent meetings should be planned so as to achieve goals agreed on by the principal and faculty.
   Yes/No
4. One of the goals of Open Houses and parent meetings should be to educate parents as to classroom curricular goals and strategies used to achieve those goals.
   Yes/No
5. Open Houses, programs, and events should serve as an enhancement to instruction and not become an interruption or distraction.
   Yes/No
6. Open Houses and parent meetings can serve as vehicles for children to share with family and community members what they have learned.
   Yes/No
7. Schools should survey parents to find out when they are most likely to attend Open Houses and parent meetings.
   Yes/No

Chapter 6

Planning and Delivering an Effective Parent Education Program

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Parent help at Oakwood became a serious issue when it was discovered that some parents were using strategies that were not only ineffective but also detrimental. Children's confidence can be destroyed, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. Overzealous parents can drill a child endlessly on phonetic elements to the point where, when faced with an unknown word in print, the only strategy the child attempts is to "sound out" the word—without regard for word structure or comprehension. Similarly, children's writing may be reduced to only those words for which they have memorized the conventional spelling, especially when they are faced with a parent who is unwilling to appreciate the conventions of spelling the child is developing and the content the child is trying to express.

The problem of ineffective parent help at home is one that must be addressed directly, with patience and care. Direct intervention must take place in the form of parent education, the goal of which is to teach parents strategies they can use at home to help their child. As you will recall from Chapter 1, research indicates that home-learning activities and gains in student achievement have a strong correlation. And, as discussed in Chapter 2, parents' lack of knowledge about how to help is a barrier to more effective parent involvement. In this chapter we will explore several strategies for helping parents gain the skills they need to help their children develop academically, as well as in other areas.

Creating Parent Spaces and Parent Education Centers

A parent space or parent education center is a place within a school that parents can call their own. Though a whole room would be ideal, that kind of space is usually not available. A corner of a room, a space at the end of the hallway, or a special section of the library can become a place where parents can find information and materials especially for them. A bulletin board for displaying messages and parent education tips, a small table, a book rack, and a couple of chairs are all that is needed to establish this area. The space should be made as inviting as possible, and parents should know of its availability.

Some schools and districts have secured grant monies to enable the hiring of a parent coordinator. If such a person is available, her or his office is, ideally, located in the parent education center. If there are no funds to cover this position, some schools utilize a teacher aide or a school volunteer to work in the parent center a few hours a day. Schools might also consider giving a couple of interested teachers some release time from their classrooms to serve as co-coordinators of the parent center. These teachers could be responsible for coordinating the efforts of other teachers and volunteers.

In a parent space or parent education center, parents can receive general parenting tips and information, ideas for helping their children in home-learning activities, and assistance in contacting community and social service agencies, to name a few of the informational services provided by some parent centers. Parents might also find follow-up information such as materials, books, tapes, or videos that they can check out to learn more about a topic or to help them apply strategies discussed in a parent meeting. If the area is large enough, the parent space may become the gathering place for parent support groups, conferences, and meetings. A parent space can also function as an information center where notices and literature about policies, procedures, upcoming events, and other pertinent school and community information could be displayed.

Parent Education: What Do Parents Need to Know?

Perhaps the most logical place to start when considering parent education is with the parents themselves. Asking parents what their needs are *before* planning topics and educational opportunities is always a good idea. If the school has an active parent-teacher organization, a brainstorming session could be held for the purpose of listing topics and areas of need or interest. After a list is generated, groups of four or five adults can work to prioritize, and if necessary limit, the list to the top five or ten ideas. The groups could then share their ideas with each other, with one person serving as recorder to "tally" the number of groups wanting each topic. The topic with the most tallies would, for example, become priority number one. This list of topics could either be adopted for that year or could first be sent to all parents for their consideration and suggestions.

A survey might also be constructed for distribution to parents during registration or during the first Open House. For non-English-speaking parents, or for parents who have difficulty reading or writing, adult volunteers might be available to translate and to read the survey questions and record the individual's responses. In Figure 6.1 is a list of topics to which parents might respond by indicating whether they were *very*, *moderately*, or *not at all* interested. Space could be provided for parents to add other topics of interest.

PARENT EDUCATION INTEREST SURVEY

For each topic, please indicate whether you are "V = very," "M = moderately," or "N = not at all" interested. This information will help us select parent education materials and plan workshops for the year.

______ 1. Guiding children's behavior.
______ 2. Is my child normal? What to expect as young children grow and develop.
______ 3. Language Development: What's normal and what's not.
______ 4. Nutrition: Tips for healthy eating.
______ 5. Substance Abuse: Recognizing the signs.
______ 6. Helping your child become a reader and a writer.
______ 7. Supporting your child's math-learning and problem-solving skills.
______ 8. Television: The good, the bad, and the ugly.
______ 9. Helping your child develop good work habits.
______ 10. Building self-esteem in children: Positive times together.
______ 11. Resources in the community: Where to go for help.
______ 12. Parent Effectiveness Training (PET).
______ 13. Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP).
______ 14. Active Parenting.
______ 15. Health Tips: When to call the doctor.

Figure 6.1

In Figure 6.2 is a sample of a survey adapted from a Head Start Center. Parents are asked to check areas where they feel inadequate, as well as areas in which they would like training.

An open-ended survey, like the one constructed by Lisa Bazzarone (see Figure 6.3), is more time-consuming, but it can yield a great deal of information if the parent is willing to take the time to fill it out.

Surveys might include items for parents to indicate the most convenient time for attending parent meetings and workshops, whether or not childcare and/or transportation will be necessary, and whether any special accommodations need to be made. If many parents require language assistance, perhaps translators—parents who speak the same language and are willing to serve as "parent-mentors"—could be made available. There may also be a need to offer sessions in languages other than English. Finally, since some parents will not be available to attend meetings, or for whatever reason do not feel comfortable attending a group meeting, a variety of parent education options need to be presented. To help in determining preferred formats, the survey might include a list of options such as home visits, books, pamphlets and reading materials, parent education videos, and individual conferences with the teacher or other resource person.

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: ________________________ Date: __________
Address: ________________________ Phone: __________
Child(ren)'s name(s): ________________________

Directions: Please check in the appropriate column ("Very difficult," "Somewhat difficult," or "No problem") for each item below.

In my job as parent I have the hardest time in:

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	No problem
1. Being an only parent			
2. Guiding my child's behavior			
3. Providing good nutrition			
4. Making time to listen and play with my child			
5. Having patience and understanding			
6. Understanding my child's growth			
7. Knowing what to do when my child is sick			
8. Other (please state)			

To do my job better as a parent I would like training in:

1. Child growth/development __________
2. Child guidance __________
3. Nutrition __________
4. Health/First aid __________
5. CPR __________
6. Early learning strategies __________
7. Working with special needs children __________

Figure 6.2

Utilizing Print Resources for Parent Education

Some parents prefer to have access to books, pamphlets, and other printed materials for learning about particular topics or seeking answers to specific questions. The materials selected for use by parents should reflect up-to-date information, be written in a clear, readable manner in language appropriate for the parent audience, and be free from stereotypes and bias. Information on a wide variety of topics should be available, and parent input via surveys, questionnaires, and informal requests should be solicited on a regular basis to ensure that materials ordered and/or collected reflect parental needs. In

PARENT SURVEY

Dear Parents,

Please respond to the questions below, and have your child return this form sealed in the enclosed envelope. This survey is intended to help me get to know you, as parents, and to help me better meet the needs of your children. All information will be kept confidential. It will be used only in making choices about what the school can offer parents. The school is currently planning on sponsoring several parent workshops, and we would like your input in deciding on workshop issues and/or themes.

Feel free to contact me at 298-4975 if you have any questions or comments about the survey. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Lisa Bazzarone

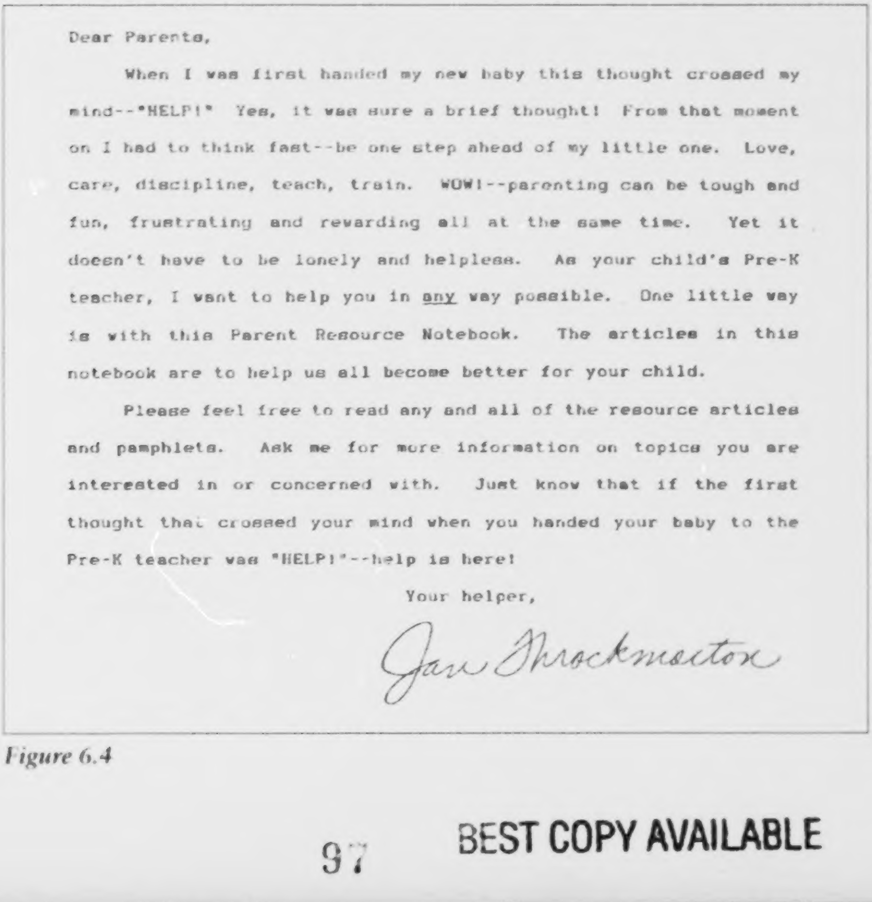
1. A question I have about my child's learning is:
2. A question I have about my child's school is:
3. Some concerns I have about my child's education are:
4. As a parent, I have the most difficulty dealing with my child when:
5. As a parent, I am unsure how to handle the situation when my child:
6. An area of child development I would like to learn more about is:
7. An issue or area in education I would like to learn more about is:
8. I would like to improve my child's learning in:
9. I would like to learn how to help my child:
10. As a member of the community, I am most concerned about my child's future when I think of:
11. As a member of the community, I wish there was more support for parents who need:
12. If I could eliminate one problem from my home, it would be:

Figure 6.3

Appendix 1 is a list of books and other print materials appropriate for inclusion in a parent library. If lack of space prohibits having a separate parent space or parent library, perhaps print materials might be housed on a special shelf of the school library—or even in the public library. If an arrangement is made with the public library, perhaps other schools in the system will want to be involved in contributing books and other print materials. In addition, the library staff may appreciate recommendations for titles of books in the area of parent education to be purchased with library funds.

Some teachers, including those at Oakwood School, have developed parent notebooks for lending to parents. A large three-ring binder contains a wide variety of journal articles, handouts, pamphlets, and brochures. Some teachers put each item in a plastic sleeve before inserting it into the notebook. Others use pocket dividers for containing items that cannot be hole-punched. Dividers with plastic tabs are used to categorize the items according to subject or interest area, with new categories frequently developed. For example, one first-grade teacher's notebook contains a section with information about beginning reading; another with information about stages of writing and invented spelling; another holds information about "hands-on" mathematics and the importance of manipulatives, patterning and problem-solving, and other sections contain information about social development, emotional development and childhood fears, motor development, and enhancing aesthetic, or artistic abilities. At the start of the school year, the teacher sends home a letter explaining the notebook and listing the types of articles included. In Figure 6.4 is the letter sent by Jan Throckmorton, a prekindergarten teacher from Petersburg, Illinois. In the table of contents for her notebook (see Figure 6.5), Jan has starred entries that explain current instructional practices used in her program.

In addition to sending a letter and contents, the notebook is displayed during Open House, and parents are encouraged either to request information about a specific topic or simply to check out the entire notebook to browse



Dear Parents,

When I was first handed my new baby this thought crossed my mind--"HELP!" Yes, it was sure a brief thought! From that moment on I had to think fast--be one step ahead of my little one. Love, care, discipline, teach, train. WOW!--parenting can be tough and fun, frustrating and rewarding all at the same time. Yet it doesn't have to be lonely and helpless. As your child's Pre-K teacher, I want to help you in any way possible. One little way is with this Parent Resource Notebook. The articles in this notebook are to help us all become better for your child.

Please feel free to read any and all of the resource articles and pamphlets. Ask me for more information on topics you are interested in or concerned with. Just know that if the first thought that crossed your mind when you handed your baby to the Pre-K teacher was "HELP!"--help is here!

Your helper,

Jan Throckmorton

Figure 6.4

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table of Contents

Emotional/Social Development

A Time of Grief
Divorce
Helping Children and Families Cope with Stress, Using Children's Books
How to Help Your Children Succeed in School*
I Don't Want to Go Back

For the Scientists, Mathematicians, and Artists

Discovering Math*
Learning through Play: Math*
Sharing Science*
Why Art?*

Importance of Play

Free Play: The First Step*
Over and Over and Over Again
Wanna Play?*

Literacy Development

Helping Children Listen*
Invented Spelling*
Reading to Your Child*

Safety

Lead Poisoning — Environmental Enemy Number One
Including Three "Get the Lead Out" Pamphlets
Media Violence and Children
When Is It Legal to Leave Children Alone?

School Readiness

Developmental Checklist*
Early Intervention*
Hearing Development
School Readiness*

*Current instructional practices (materials).

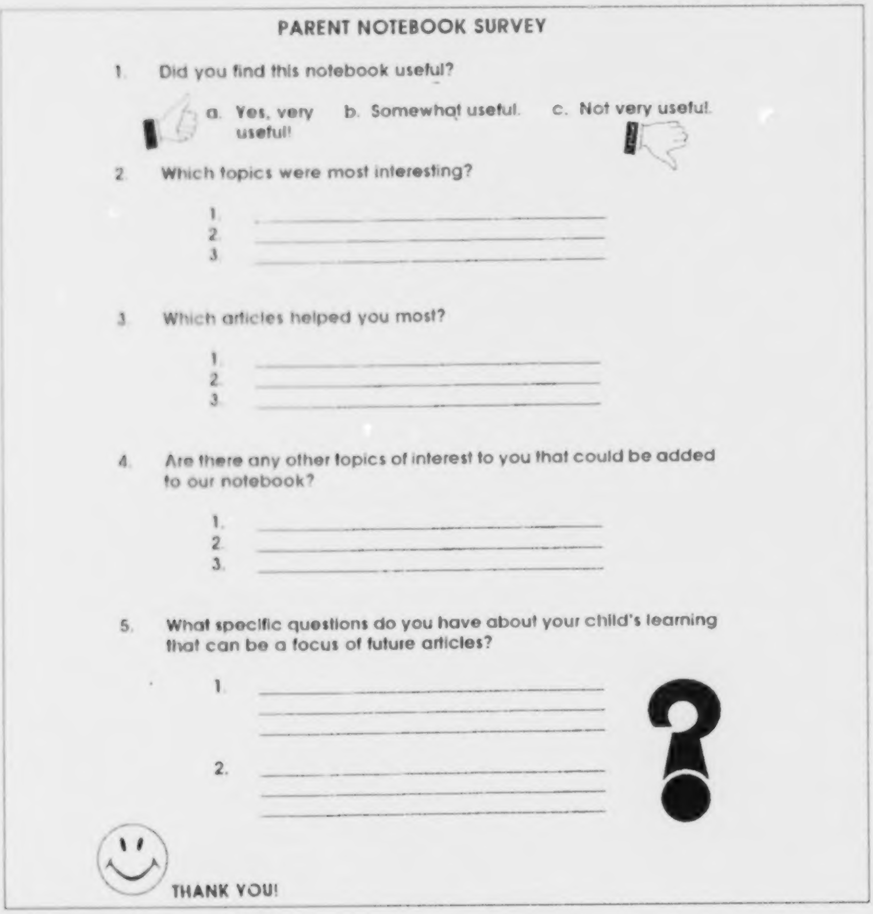
Figure 6.5

for articles of interest. In Figure 6.6 is a sample of a parent response sheet that accompanies the notebook each time it is checked out. This sheet provides regular feedback and helps the teacher learn about areas where parents would like to see more information.

Some parents simply are not interested in reading even an article-length publication. For this reason Peg Simon, parent coordinator for the Quincy Public Schools, developed a series of parent handouts on a wide variety of topics. When a parent asks a question, Peg can just turn to that file, pull out a one-page handout, and give it to the parent with an offer to discuss the issue further or to locate additional information. If there is no existing file for a particular issue, Peg uses the school's well-stocked resource library to develop a file.

Parent Education Video Library

Since most parents have access to a video player, a collection of videos suitable for parent education can provide yet another option for some parents. The videos selected should be of good quality, contain important up-to-date information on a variety of topics of interest to parents, be appealing to the parents for whom they were selected, and be free from cultural or racial bias. In addition, the information should be presented in a clear, straightforward manner, using language suitable for the parent clientele.



PARENT NOTEBOOK SURVEY

1. Did you find this notebook useful?

a. Yes, very useful! b. Somewhat useful. c. Not very useful.

2. Which topics were most interesting?

1. ____
2. ____
3. ____

3. Which articles helped you most?

1. ____
2. ____
3. ____

4. Are there any other topics of interest to you that could be added to our notebook?

1. ____
2. ____
3. ____

5. What specific questions do you have about your child's learning that can be a focus of future articles?

1. ____
2. ____

THANK YOU!

Figure 6.6

Videotapes may be developed "in house" by schools or districts or purchased commercially. Videos six to eight minutes in length can be effective in demonstrating single strategies for at-home-learning: for example, how to interact with a young child during the bedtime story routine or what to do when a child comes to a printed word he or she doesn't know. Videotaping parent workshops, particularly workshops with guest speakers, is another idea. Having these tapes is particularly helpful when parents have a strong interest in a topic but cannot attend the workshop.

Good commercial videos are becoming increasingly available, many at very reasonable costs. Professional organizations are one good source to explore. For example, the International Reading Association has developed videos that are appropriate for parental viewing. An annotated list of videos is given in Appendix 2, along with publisher information.

Some communities have become involved in supporting parent education video libraries. With donations from businesses and local members of the community, videotapes have been acquired and housed at a central location, such as a public library. This arrangement benefits both the schools and the community. Through a cooperative agreement with Circus Video in Macomb, Illinois, parent education videos donated by various sources are bar-coded and housed in a special "family" section of the store. These videos are available for check out, free-of-charge, to the public. The video tapes in this collection cover a wide range of issues related to the care and education of young children, from how to cope with stress to knowing when to take a child to the doctor.

Home-Learning Activities

Research indicates that parents want teachers to tell them how they can help their child at home. The "Take Home Bags" created by Barbara Brinkman, a special education prekindergarten teacher, were developed to foster parent/child interaction in literacy and math activities at home. Attached to each bag is a laminated notecard with a list of the contents of the bag and directions for the parent. Four of Barbara's Take Home Bags are described in Figure 6.7.

Sheila Shearer, a second-grade teacher in Macomb, Illinois, has created twenty "author" bags for her students to check out for at-home use. Each bag contains a brief bibliography of the featured author, several books written by the author, and enrichment activities. A card listing the contents is attached to each bag. In addition to these bags, a special bear with its own bag of books and toys is rotated among the students with a journal for recording its experiences at each child's home. These take-home materials help foster a positive relationship between home and school and let parents know that parental involvement is a priority with this teacher.

Many teachers actively solicit parental assistance in helping children with school projects and assignments. In Figure 6.8 is an example of a parent letter sent by Macomb, Illinois, teacher Camille Breheny. The letter was sent to solicit parental assistance in reading aloud from content area books sent home each evening for a week. The children had developed a list of questions, and they were to listen to find answers to their questions, as well as to gain new information about the topic.

First-grade parents in Carol Davis's classroom are asked to spend some time reading with their child and to keep track of their child's progress and interest. On a form sent home (see Figure 6.9) parents check the sentence that best describes their child's reading. On another form (see Figure 6.10) the child gets to place a star on the chart for each day the parents read orally to

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TAKE-HOME BAGS

Hungry Caterpillar: This bag includes the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (Scholastic, 1989). The parents are asked to read the book to the child and have the child retell the story using his or her own words. Then, for the following week the family is to assist the child in filling out a chart showing what he or she ate for dinner each evening. The chart may be in pictures or words. When completed, the chart is returned to school along with the bag so that the child can participate in group-sharing time.

Peanut Butter and Jelly: This bag includes the book *Peanut Butter and Jelly* by Nadine Westcott (E. P. Dutton, 1987) and also the accompanying cassette tape. The parents are asked to read the book to their child, listen to the tape, or do both. After the story, the children are asked to draw a picture of themselves eating their favorite food. The parents are requested to write down the story the children tell them about their picture. Additional activity directions can also be found on the cassette tape. The bag and its contents, along with the child's picture, are returned to school so that the child may share the work in class.

The Little Engine That Could: This bag contains the book *The Little Engine That Could* retold by Watty Piper (Platt & Monk, 1961). The parents are asked to read this book with their child and talk about things the child can do. The parents are to generate a list with the child (for example: Put on my pants, comb my hair, tie my shoes, brush my teeth, pick up my toys). The parents are asked to return the bag to school with the child's list. The child can share the list in class during group-sharing time.

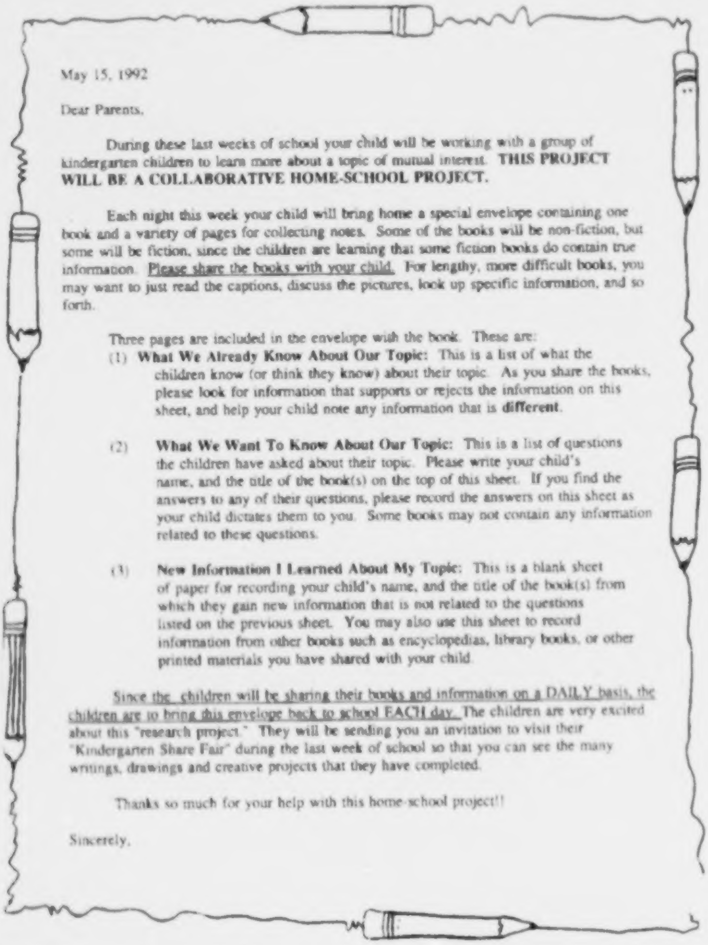
Shape Sort: This take-home bag contains an envelope full of circles, triangles, and squares made of laminated construction paper. The parents are asked to help their child divide the shapes into three piles, according to their shapes. The parents may also be asked to sort the shapes according to other attributes, such as by size or by colors. When finished, the children go on a shape hunt with their family to find the three shapes around the house.

Figure 6.7

him or her. Parents are also educated about the methods used by the teacher to evaluate the children's progress. In Figure 6.11 is a letter Carol sent home to explain children's developmental stages in spelling and how these relate to her evaluation process.

Activities designed for parent and child interaction can be developed by the classroom teacher or purchased from a commercial publishing company.

Activities should require no special equipment or supplies, should be written in a clear and easily understood manner, and should be relatively easy for the child to do with parental guidance. Most teachers prefer to review the activity directions before sending the sheet home, so that children will already be familiar with what they are to do. Whenever possible, the home-learning activity should relate to a study that is ongoing in the classroom. For example, a home-learning activity for children studying bugs might be



May 15, 1992

Dear Parents,

During these last weeks of school your child will be working with a group of kindergarten children to learn more about a topic of mutual interest. **THIS PROJECT WILL BE A COLLABORATIVE HOME-SCHOOL PROJECT.**

Each night this week your child will bring home a special envelope containing one book and a variety of pages for collecting notes. Some of the books will be non-fiction, but some will be fiction, since the children are learning that some fiction books do contain true information. Please share the books with your child. For lengthy, more difficult books, you may want to just read the captions, discuss the pictures, look up specific information, and so forth.

Three pages are included in the envelope with the book. These are:

(1) **What We Already Know About Our Topic:** This is a list of what the children know (or think they know) about their topic. As you share the books, please look for information that supports or rejects the information on this sheet, and help your child note any information that is **different**.

(2) **What We Want To Know About Our Topic:** This is a list of questions the children have asked about their topic. Please write your child's name, and the title of the book(s) on the top of this sheet. If you find the answers to any of their questions, please record the answers on this sheet as your child dictates them to you. Some books may not contain any information related to these questions.

(3) **New Information I Learned About My Topic:** This is a blank sheet of paper for recording your child's name, and the title of the book(s) from which they gain new information that is not related to the questions listed on the previous sheet. You may also use this sheet to record information from other books such as encyclopedias, library books, or other printed materials you have shared with your child.

Since the children will be sharing their books and information on a DAILY basis, the children are to bring this envelope back to school EACH day. The children are very excited about this "research project." They will be sending you an invitation to visit their "Kindergarten Share Fair" during the last week of school so that you can see the many writings, drawings and creative projects that they have completed.

Thanks so much for your help with this home-school project!!

Sincerely,

Figure 6.8

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

READING REPORT

Parent signature ____________________

Student signature ____________________

Please listen to your child "read" the literature book he/she brings home each week, and then decide which sentence BEST describes his/her reading.

1. My child was hesitant to read the literature book.
2. My child needed some help with about half the words.
3. My child could read about ninety percent of the book without my help.
4. My child read the book with *great* enthusiasm and knew all of the words.

Additional Comments:

Note: Please return with weekly packet on Monday.

Figure 6.9

PARENT GRADE SHEET

Parents of ____________________
student's name

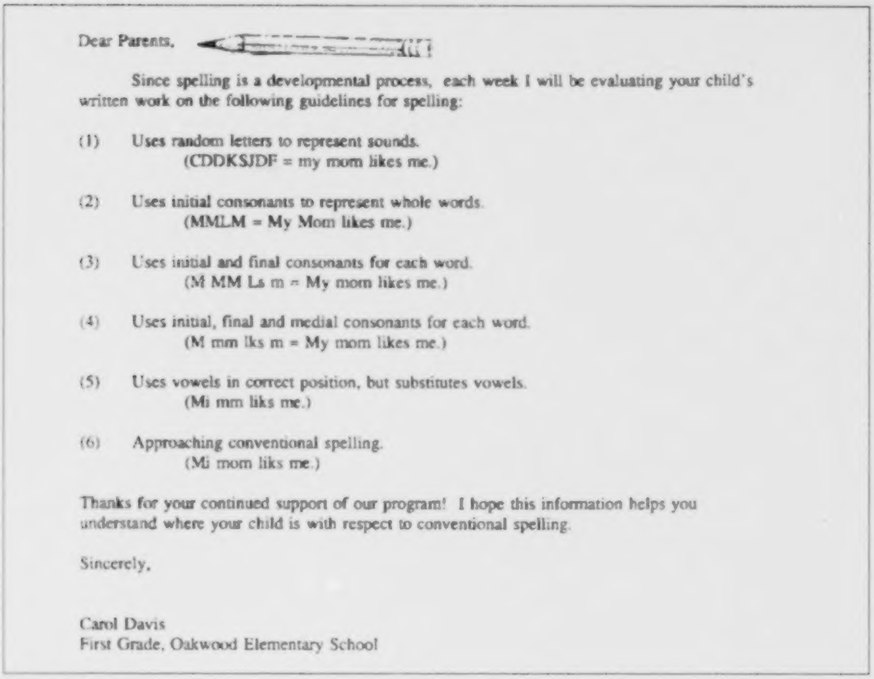
Date ____________

In an effort to involve parents in their children's reading, we are asking children to encourage their parents to read to them every day. Your child gets to place a star under each day that this happens. We will be glad to help you get books and hope that book time becomes a happy time for you to share the joy of reading with your child.

Sunday	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*

Figure 6.10

to interview family members to find out how they feel about various types of bugs. In a study of seeds, children may be asked to take a walk with their parents to gather seeds to bring to school. Sometimes home-learning activi-



Dear Parents,

Since spelling is a developmental process, each week I will be evaluating your child's written work on the following guidelines for spelling:

(1) Uses random letters to represent sounds.
(CDDKSJDF = my mom likes me.)

(2) Uses initial consonants to represent whole words.
(MMLM = My Mom likes me.)

(3) Uses initial and final consonants for each word.
(M MM Ls m = My mom likes me.)

(4) Uses initial, final and medial consonants for each word.
(M mm lks m = My mom likes me.)

(5) Uses vowels in correct position, but substitutes vowels.
(Mi mm liks me.)

(6) Approaching conventional spelling.
(Mi mom liks me.)

Thanks for your continued support of our program! I hope this information helps you understand where your child is with respect to conventional spelling.

Sincerely,

Carol Davis
First Grade, Oakwood Elementary School

Figure 6.11

ties involve watching for current events on the news or watching the weather to record daily rainfall or temperatures. Family members assist by discussing the news and/or weather with the student. Most teachers find that having parents "sign off" verifying that the activity was completed is a good idea and one that increases the probability that parents will participate with their child. It is also a good idea to include at the bottom of each activity a place for parents to comment about whether their child could easily perform the task with adult guidance, the time required to complete the activity, and whether the task appeared to be beneficial. The addition of this comment section is especially important when using commercial materials that have not been developed expressly for your particular students and their families.

To solicit family involvement in home-learning activities, some prekindergarten teachers send home lists of items commonly found in the home that can be used as learning tools. Included in these lists are items such as empty boxes for nesting and for building; buttons for sorting by size, color, shape, and number of holes; and plastic glasses and cups for water play by which young children begin to acquire concepts of volume, measurement, and conservation. Reading through these lists helps parents begin to think of other items and new ways to help their child learn by manipulating common household objects.

Springfield, Illinois, teachers Cindy Kugler and Wanda Winebrinner developed ten take-home interactive activity bags to help parents provide hands-on learning experiences at home. Each bag contains a children's book, a related hands-on activity, and all the materials and directions needed for the family to do the activity together at home. In Figure 6.12 are descriptions of two of the activity kits.

Some commercial publishing companies have developed reproducible "send homes." Scholastic's *Pre-K Today Parent Communication Tips* is one such publication. It contains pages on learning through play, health and safety, cooking and nutrition, and special situations such as coping with separation. Some of the pages are designed primarily for parent education, such as the pages on "First Aid for Burns" and "Helping Language Grow," while other pages include tips for parents, as well as suggested activities for parent-child interactions.

Parent Meetings

Multipurpose parent meetings, such as those hosted by the parent-teacher organization, can serve a variety of purposes, including dissemination of information, socialization, parent advocacy, and parent education. Research shows that parents want to know more about the school program; therefore, curriculum sharing is an important function of the PTA meetings scheduled at Oakwood School. Each program is highlighted at one of the meetings, and, as often as possible, children are asked to participate in the program. For example, when the physical education program was highlighted, the P.E. teacher talked to parents about the goals of the program and asked children to demonstrate various activities. Following the art teacher's talk at another meeting, family members were invited to view the children's art displayed throughout the building. Because these meetings are held in the evening and include children's participation, attendance is usually quite good.

Sometimes special guest speakers are invited to make a presentation before or after the PTA business meeting is conducted. The topics chosen have broad appeal to parents of all age groups, and the presentation format used typically includes a twenty- to thirty-minute lecture/demonstration followed by a question and answer period.

Follow-up of the information presented in the parent meeting is important, especially when time is limited, as is often the case at parent meetings where purposes other than parent education are being met. Having participants jot down two or three questions they have about the topic *at the close of the session* can help shape the follow-up opportunities offered. Handouts, a video, or perhaps a small-group discussion may be among the types of options offered. A brief synopsis of the presentation might be included in a future school newsletter to serve as a reminder to participants of information gained.

Activity: High Rollers

Objective: The child will recognize number dot patterns, number symbols and practice number writing.

Materials: Dice bag, *Ten Black Dots* by Donald Crews, teacher-made number book, foam dice, recording sheet, pencil.

Directions:

1. Read *Ten Black Dots* and the teacher-made number book (you may keep this book for home reference).
2. Reread number book and trace numbers with fingers
3. Youngest player rolls a die, whatever number of dots is rolled, the player writes the numeral in the proper column on the recording sheet. (e.g., if you roll 3 dots you would write the number 3).
4. Play continues alternating turns.
5. The winner is the first person to complete a column.

Extension Activities:

1. Play "Write the Larger Number."
   Directions: Roll two dice, whatever number is larger write that numeral on the recording sheet.
2. Play "Write the Lesser Number."
   Directions: Roll two dice, whatever number is less write that numeral on the recording sheet.

Activity: I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing

Objective: The child will retell a story in sequence.

Materials: Cocoon shaped bag, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, green shoe lace with bead (caterpillar), fruit cutout story pieces, coffee filters, washable markers, pipe cleaners, coffee filter butterfly example.

Directions:

1. Read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.*
2. Reread the story. Model using the green shoe lace caterpillar and "eat" through the fruit cutouts.
3. Have your child retell the story using the shoelace caterpillar and the fruit cutouts. Afterward, tie the shoelace ends together to make a caterpillar necklace.
4. Child may bring story necklace to share with the class.

Extension Activity: Coffee Filter Butterfly

1. Fold a coffee filter into fourths.
2. Use the washable markers to create a design on the filter.
3. Dip the tip of the filter into a cup of water and watch the water as it absorbs.
4. Unfold and let dry.
5. Pull up and pinch the filter together in the middle and secure it with a pipe cleaner. This forms the butterfly's body.

Figure 6.12

Parent Workshops

A workshop can be a very effective strategy for helping parents gain the knowledge and skills they need to support their child's learning. By its very nature, the label *workshop* implies a session that affords hands-on involvement and a more intensive experience than can be gained through a parent meeting. Workshop topics can come from parent surveys and needs assessments, as well as from curricular issues that the faculty know need to be addressed. Whatever the topic, the emphasis should be on helping parents acquire strategies they can use at home with their children. Once the topic has been selected, consideration needs to be given to the logistics of scheduling, transportation, childcare, advertising, and planning the content of the workshop.

As far as a suggested length of time for a parent workshop, a 1½- to 2-hour workshop allows for ample time for presentation and for audience participation in small-group activities, question and discussion periods, and refreshments and informal conversation. Workshops should be scheduled at a time most convenient for the majority of the parents in your target audience. As discussed earlier, parents might be surveyed to determine "best" times for scheduling workshops and meetings. Also, you might consider having both a daytime and evening presentation time and/or videotaping the workshop to lend the tape to nonattending parents who are interested. Transportation is sometimes an issue for families, as is childcare. If these items are not covered in your school or program budget, perhaps a parent volunteer group or community service organization might agree to help.

While most parent workshops are held in school buildings, some consideration might be given to other locations, such as the public library or a local community center or church. Sometimes parents are more willing to attend a workshop held in a familiar place—one that feels comfortable and "safe." In one small community the meeting room of a local fast-food restaurant is a favored place for holding parent workshops. Regardless of where the workshop is held, availability of adequate parking, space, furnishings, audiovisual equipment, restroom facilities, and lighting and ventilation all need to be checked out before final scheduling arrangements are made.

Workshop format: parents only. Involvement is a key ingredient of effective workshops. Whether parents attend the workshop with their children or not, they need to be involved in activities related to the topic. In this section we discuss and give examples of "adults only" workshop sessions; then in the next section we describe characteristics of parent/child interaction workshops, giving examples of sessions that we have found to be particularly effective.

Workshops may be planned by one or two individuals or by an entire school staff. The more individuals who participate in the planning process, the greater chance you have for meeting the needs of more parents, since each individual brings different experiences and insights to the planning process. A good place to start is with *anticipated outcomes* or objectives for the workshop. What specifically do you hope parents will learn as a result of their involvement in this workshop? What do you want them to learn to do at home? Answers to these questions will help you form outcomes or objectives that can then serve as guideposts for the content and experiences you plan. Writing a *rationale* or purpose for the workshop, in language appropriate for the intended audience also serves to focus the content to be delivered. Although parents do want and need strategies to use at home with their children, they also need to understand why these strategies are important and how they will help their child. For this reason it is important that at least a portion of the workshop be devoted to helping parents realize the theory behind the practical strategies that will be shared. Having an understanding as to *why* the information is important also increases the chances that parents will actually *apply* the information at home. This part of the presentation should be carefully planned. Limiting the number of major points to be conveyed and providing a handout that reinforces them is recommended. Also, well-constructed visuals serve to focus the learner's attention and add interest and appeal to the presentation. Posters, overhead transparencies, and other visuals should be designed with the size of the room and audience in mind. Letters and words should be spaced well, in bold print or type that is clearly readable by everyone in the room.

Consideration as to how adults learn is also important. We know from theories of adult learning that information to be presented must be relevant to their needs, challenging, and interesting. We also know that recognition of what adults already know and bring to the learning task is important. Parents have a wide array of past experiences—some of which may contradict the information the school is attempting to impart. For this reason an opportunity to voice questions, concerns, and ideas related to the content presented must be provided. Since adults, like children, learn best through hands-on experiences, parents should be actively involved for at least a portion of the workshop. Arranging the room into learning centers where participants may engage in a variety of activities related to the topic has a number of advantages. Probably the most important advantage is that using centers reduces group size and promotes more interaction among parents and among parents and workshop leaders. Another benefit is that centers allow for participant choice based on areas of greatest interest and/or need. Finally, use of centers frequently results in reduced tension and anxiety of presenters, since the center format is more relaxed and informal.

Rotation to various centers can occur in many ways. Sometimes parents are miscellaneously grouped according to the color of their name tag or the table where they are sitting. Other times, parents select the group or center where they would like to begin. Having a group of four to eight parents in a center allows for adequate group interaction and hands-on participation. Also, encouraging parents to ask their questions during small-group center activities generally yields better results than if time for questions is provided only during whole-group times. If there aren't enough parents in attendance to allow for at least three parents in each center, closing centers temporarily and having parents move between a fewer number of centers is usually a good idea. Decide whether to have parents rotate with their group for a designated amount of time at each center or whether to allow parents to select only those centers that interest them most. You may decide to have parents choose to attend two or three centers from a total of four to six. Although parents may not get to attend all of the centers that interest them, this approach does allow for more time to be spent at each center. Having the handouts from each center available for all participants is one way to let everyone take home at least some of the ideas from each center.

Setting a time for participants to come together to discuss what they learned from the center activities is recommended. Workshop presenters may take a few minutes to redirect participants' attention to the rationale shared at the onset of the workshop. Handouts and other "make-it-take-it" materials serve as tangible reminders of the workshop and, again, increase the probability that parents will use the ideas presented with their own children. This is a good time to have participants evaluate the workshop. Finding out what worked well—and what didn't—as well as ideas for future workshops, is important. Informal evaluation can also take place throughout the workshop as presenters and/or other school staff members observe participants' reactions to and involvement in the various aspects of the workshop.

Part of planning a workshop should involve creating a written agenda. This agenda serves as the framework for more detailed planning of each segment of the workshop, from the first moment parents enter to the opening remarks and icebreaker or get-acquainted activity, to the closing statements and evaluation. Preparing a detailed, annotated agenda for use by workshop presenters is extremely helpful and serves to keep everyone focused and on schedule throughout the workshop. In Figure 6.13 is an example of an annotated agenda for a parent workshop

As most workshop presenters have learned, it is important to be an early bird. Some parents *always* arrive early! Workshop leaders or other school staff volunteers need to be on hand to greet parents; help them locate the coat rack, childcare area, and/or restrooms; fill out a name tag; and, in general, serve as host or hostess. Having coffee or juice already set up can help parents feel more at ease, since people tend to congregate around a refreshment table. Another good idea is to have displays of books and other materials related to the topic for the evening. In schools where there is a parent resource library, bringing to the room pertinent items on a cart and materials needed for checking them out is one good way to get some of the items into circulation. Finally, displays of children's work always draw parents' attention.

A get-acquainted activity helps "break the ice" and relax participants. If time permits, a "mixer" where participants circulate around the room chatting with each other works well. Activities such as "scrambled name tags," in which participants try to "decode" each other's first names, and the scavenger hunt activity described in Figure 6.14 are two icebreakers that have

AGENDA
MESSY PLAY IS A-OKAY

- I. Welcome
  - A. Welcome poster
  - B. Area posters
- II. Greeting
  - A. Opening remarks
    - 1. Purpose of messy play
    - 2. Value of messy play to child's development
  - B. Icebreaker
    - 1. Human bingo
    - 2. Relate to messy experiences recalled from parents' own childhood
  - C. Introduction of presenters and their centers
    - 1. Lori Kies
    - 2. Lynn Kleine
    - 3. Dana Rees Rives
    - 4. Sharon Sample
    - 5. Martha Sprecher
  - D. Break into groups by color of bingo card
- III. Group Participation in Centers
  - A. Painting activities
    - 1. Recipes for homemade paints
    - 2. Vegetable and fruit prints
    - 3. Use of various implements for painting
      - a. fly swatter
      - b. q-tips
      - c. spray bottles
  - B. Pudding is not just for eating
    - 1. Feely bags
    - 2. Finger painting
  - C. Fun with paper and string
    - 1. Tissue paper and starch art
    - 2. Paper punch pictures
    - 3. Collage
  - D. Fun with playdough
    - 1. Homemade playdough recipes
    - 2. Shaping, rolling, and cutting
- IV. Conclusion
  - A. Coming together as a large group
  - B. Closing remarks
    - 1. Value of messy play
    - 2. Ideas gained in center activities
  - C. Handouts, other ideas for messy play
  - D. Evaluations

Figure 6.13

been used successfully in many workshop settings. If time or space is very limited, asking for a show of hands to such questions as "How many children do you have? One? Two? Three?" and "How many people live in the same

SCAVENGER HUNT
FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Find someone in the group who:

NAME

__________ 1. Has only one child.
__________ 2. Has both a boy and a girl.
__________ 3. Is a single parent.
__________ 4. Has three or more children.
__________ 5. Was born the same year as you were.
__________ 6. Has a child the same age as your child.
__________ 7. Has lived in a household in which an older relative, e.g., a grandparent, is also living.
__________ 8. Currently lives within fifty miles of his/her childhood home.
__________ 9. Currently lives more than five-hundred miles from his/her childhood home.
__________ 10. As a child, lived in the same community as his/her grandparents.
__________ 11. As a child, lived in a state other than that which his/her grandparents lived.
__________ 12. Grew up in a family in which both parents worked outside of the home.
__________ 13. Was an only child.
__________ 14. As a child, lived on a farm.
__________ 15. As a child, lived in a city.
__________ 16. Is a full-time student.
__________ 17. Speaks more than one language.

Figure 6.14

town as the one in which you grew up?" can be directed to the entire group. This type of getting-to-know-you information could also be solicited in graph form on charts displayed prior to the start of the workshop. The information could be discussed at the workshop opening as a way to help everyone learn a little about the makeup of the group.

If possible, activities for the children in childcare can follow the same theme or topic of the parent workshop. For example, if the theme of the parent workshop is literacy development, the children in childcare might be reading stories, making bookmarks, and participating in various writing and bookmaking activities. In Figure 6.15 is a plan for activities that were conducted with children while parents attended a workshop on health and nutrition. In Figure 6.16 is the agenda given to parents attending this workshop.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION WORKSHOP: CHILDCARE ACTIVITIES

Workshop Leader: Vicky Lin

6:30–6:45 Introduction

1. Give every child a name tag depicting a picture of a food.
2. Free play in centers until everyone has arrived.
    - fruit/vegetable puzzles
    - housekeeping area with plastic foods and cooking utensils
    - food posters
    - playdough with food-shaped cutters and molds
    - book corner with various food-related books

6:45–7:15 Group Time

1. Divide children into groups according to age/grade level
2. Show display of foods and food pictures. Discuss each, asking children to tell about their favorite and least-favorite foods. Ask children to classify foods and food pictures into groups. Encourage as many different groupings as possible. These may include basic food groups, healthy/"junk" foods, sweet/salty, fresh/canned, or frozen foods.

7:15–7:30 Exercise

1. Show posters and talk about benefits of exercise. Point out that exercise can be fun.
2. Engage children in various fun types of exercise
    - Hokey Pokey
    - Ring around the Rosie
    - London Bridge

Figure 6.15 *(Continued on next page)*

Although a guest speaker may be invited to conduct a workshop or a portion of a workshop, the school staff should take responsibility for the planning and should convey to the guest speaker exactly what his or her role will be. Teachers and administrators certainly have many obligations and demands on their time; however, taking a leadership role in sharing helpful information with parents and demonstrating effective instructional strategies will reap many positive outcomes. Parents feel good knowing that teachers and administrators are experts and that they are willing to share their expertise with others. Workshop presenters inspire confidence in parents who have often had very limited opportunities to hear these individuals talk about their ideas and beliefs. Working with parents in a workshop situation enables teachers to demonstrate the exact strategies they want parents to use at home to sup-

7:30–8:00 Preparation and Eating of Healthy Snack Foods

1. Show centers with foods to prepare for snacks.
2. Read through the picture recipe cards located at each center and demonstrate how to follow the pictures to make each snack.
3. Divide children into groups to rotate to each snack center.
    - Chicken feed: Measure amounts of cereal and dried fruits
    - Fruit kabobs: Make a pattern with various fruits
    - Fruitloop necklaces: String cereal on yarn to make an edible necklace.
    - Star sandwiches: Cut bread into star shape using a cookie cutter. Spread with pineapple/carrot sandwich filling or peanut butter/honey filling.

8:00–8:30 Storytime

1. Read big book version of *Potluck* by Anne Shelby.
2. Talk about a potluck. Give each child a paper plate on which to draw or paste a magazine picture of a food they would like to bring to a potluck.
3. Let children share their potluck dishes with each other.

Figure 6.15 (continued)

port skills being acquired at school. Sharing this information with parents helps solidify the home-school partnership and is generally a very rewarding experience for teachers. Further, since teachers usually work together to plan and present a workshop, they often get many ideas from each other, and leave the workshop feeling as if they gained almost as much as they contributed.

Parent/Child Interaction Workshops

Another type of parent workshop is one where parents or other adults who play a significant role in the child's life attend the workshop with the child. Again, a 1 1/2-hour time period works well, with the first 45 to 55 minutes devoted to activities participated in jointly by parents and children. As they enter the room, parents and children are greeted by a teacher who briefly explains how the room is set up, the activities that are available, and the purpose for this first part of the workshop: to give parents and children an opportunity to try out some effective learning strategies they can use at home. Parents and children are allowed to move to and from each activity at their own pace. In each activity area are signs with printed instructions. A school staff member is present to *facilitate*—not direct—each activity, with the parent being encouraged to let the child take the lead in the activity. At a predesignated time, parents are asked to gather informally in a refreshment area as their children are taken to another room for their snack. At this time,

AGENDA

Registration: 6:15–6:30
Horrabin Hall, Rm. 1, WIU campus

Welcome & Introductions: 6:30–6:40
Kathy Barclay, WIU

Mini-Session One: 6:40–7:25
Dealing Effectively with Mealtime Hassles While Maintaining a Young Child's Health and Weight
Eli Proctor, R.D., Nutrition Services, McDonough District Hospital,
525 East Grant Street, Macomb, IL. Phone: 833-4101

Break: 7:25–7:40
Refreshment Centers. Make your own snack, featuring easy, nutritious recipes suitable for use with young children.

- Tropical sandwiches
- Crunchy carrot sandwiches
- Fruit kabobs
- Creepy crawlers
- Chicken feed
- Hot cocoa mix
- Hot spiced tea mix

Mini-Session Two: 7:40–8:25
Health Issues Young Children Face
Bonnie Bartlett, R.N. Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, Beu Health Center,
WIU, Macomb, IL 61255. Phone: 298-1888

Announcements of Future Workshops & Workshop Evaluation: 8:25
Please take a few moments to fill out the evaluation form and return it to the box on the registration table.

Figure 6.16

parents are provided with pertinent handouts and other materials and have an opportunity to discuss with workshop leaders what the children experienced during the interaction, why the activities were chosen to enhance learning, and how the activities could be used at home.

The role of the facilitator at each activity area is key to the success of this type of workshop. The facilitator models behaviors for the parents and informally explains how the activity contributes to the child's learning and development. Without this, the activity centers may degenerate to the level of a "kiddie carnival" where the anticipated outcome is simply to provide a period of recreation and family fun. Parent/child interaction workshops also differ from a kiddie carnival in that they are most often designed with a special audience in mind—a particular group of children and their parents—and specific outcomes are anticipated. Other siblings are provided for in a child-care setting away from the workshop area to allow for undisturbed interaction between the child and one or more adults.

The topics for parent/child interaction workshops can, as discussed earlier, be drawn from parent interest surveys, needs assessments, or from the curriculum. Since these types of workshops are particularly suitable for parents and young children, topics may also come from information gained through home visits. For example, one teacher noticed that children were not often allowed to engage in activities that involved painting, cutting, or playdough. "Messy play" became the topic for a future parent/child interaction workshop where parents gained valuable experience and information about the importance of messy play to a young child's development. The parents and children made mud pies, played with playdough, painted with fingerpaints, and cut shapes from old magazines and glued them onto large pieces of newspaper. During the follow-up discussion period, parents discussed what they learned from this experience. Some described how hard it was for them to relax and play with their child; others talked about how nervous they were about making a mess. All agreed that clean-up was manageable and that the children had demonstrated wonderful creative abilities and language skills throughout the experience.

Sometimes parent/child interaction workshops are planned for all children in the school. At Oakwood School, letters are mailed home inviting parents to a "literacy night." The letters are mailed, rather than sent home in book bags, resulting in better attendance, since parents are made aware of the importance the school places on this event. The evening is planned so that parents and children come together by grade level to watch a video of a child reading aloud to a parent. A teacher stops the video at key times and points out strategies employed by both the child and the teacher. The parents are given a handout explaining the decoding and comprehension strategies that children have learned in the classroom. They are also given tips for reminding their children about the strategies and are asked to let the children have time to recall and use the strategies before they offer any assistance. Following the video and any questions and discussion, each parent and child select a book from a display and practice what they have learned. The same format is used to show parents how to work with their children as they attempt to spell unfamiliar words. Oakwood teachers use the "Have a Go" strategy from Reggie Routman (1991) in which children are asked to try to spell the word on their own. The adult's role is to tell the child what is correct about each attempt. The child attempts the word three times, using the feedback from the adult to get closer and closer to the conventional spelling. If the word is still not spelled conventionally by the third try, the adult supplies the spelling. This strategy reinforces for children the spelling conventions they do know, while helping them acquire those that they do not. It also illustrates for parents the value in letting children think through the process. As parents and children try out the strategies, teachers serve as facilitators, walking around the room to answer questions and provide assistance as needed.

The planning for an interaction-type workshop needs to be done in as careful and thorough a manner as that for an "adults-only" workshop. It is not simply a matter of working up a few fun activities. For example, activities selected should be ones that will result in good interaction between parent and child. If an activity is too simplistic, too common, the parent will tend to draw back and observe—rather than participate with—their child. If the activity is too complex, requiring a great deal of adult assistance, the child's attention is likely to wander, and the adult may end up completing the task without sufficient involvement from the child. In addition, the activities selected should directly target the anticipated outcomes or goals for the workshop and serve to illustrate effective strategies for home use. Once children and parents have worked together to make a pinecone bird feeder, what are they to do at home? Teachers must consider the long-term benefits of the activities and carefully select those activities that will, hopefully, result in the most use at home.

Once activities have been selected, and directions for each have been written in language understandable to parents, key comments and suggested words of explanation for facilitators to share with parents should be planned. Without this conscious planning, it is simply too easy for a facilitator to get caught up in the moment and let parents get away without really understanding the purpose for a particular activity. Finally, a list of thought-provoking questions to trigger parent response in the second part of the workshop should be written out. These questions should be designed so as to lead the parent to some main ideas about the purpose and value of the activities presented. They might also serve to elicit parents' level of comfort in recreating the activities at home, as well as their ideas about extending the activities even further.

Sometimes special adult/child evenings are planned with the goal of promoting involvement of another individual in the child's life, such as an aunt, uncle, special friend, or grandparent. Shelley Golden's prekindergarten program in Galesburg, Illinois, hosts an annual "Big Guy and Me" evening during which children and their guests construct a bookshelf or other item to take home. While the anticipated outcomes for this type of workshop differ from the parent/child workshop described above, they do serve to promote interest in the program and some increased understanding of the importance of adult/child interaction at school and at home. As with the adults-only workshop, participants should be asked to evaluate the parent/child interaction session and give suggestions for future sessions. Facilitators can also assist in evaluating the workshop, noting whether parents and children are interacting freely, whether parents appear interested in the activities, and whether they have questions that indicate their intention to try out the activities at home.

Follow-up of Parent Education Activities

Regardless of whether parent education is offered through books and printed materials, video tapes, or parent meetings and workshops, some planned follow-up should occur. Follow-up for written materials distributed on request from a parent might include a note or telephone call from the teacher asking if the parent's interests, concerns, or questions were accommodated or if assistance in locating additional material is desired. This serves as an invitation for the parent to talk to the teacher about what was gained from the materials. When written materials are sent to all parents, such as when a brief parent education article is attached to the school or classroom newsletter, a future newsletter may contain a note inviting parents to attend a brown-bag lunch discussion about the article. Parents who attended a particular meeting or workshop may also be invited to attend a small group follow-up session for purposes of describing how they used the strategies presented, asking questions, or sharing with others the difficulties they had in using the strategies. Follow-up may also be in the form of an additional handout of ideas related to the ones shared in a previous session. The point is that some follow-up be planned in an effort to assist parents in applying the strategies at home.

Increasing Attendance at Parent Meetings and Workshops

Why is it that some parent meetings and workshops are an absolute "sellout" while others draw only a handful of participants? Sometimes the answer can be found in the ways parents were notified about the meeting. Invitations need to appear well in advance of the scheduled meeting or workshop and need to come in a variety of forms. Including the date on the school monthly calendar, writing an enticing "advertisement" for school and classroom newsletters, sending fliers with information about the workshop, and having students write invitations are all examples of ways to send the message about an upcoming event. Some schools have found that attendance increases if parents have to preregister for the event and sign up in advance for childcare and transportation. Reminder notes can be sent to parents who preregistered.

Some teachers, despite efforts to plan excellent opportunities for parent education—scheduled at times convenient to parents—have been disappointed by very low attendance. If schools have followed the suggestions discussed earlier in this chapter, have surveyed parents to determine interests, needs, and preferred schedules, have arranged for transportation and childcare, and have invited parents far enough in advance and sent follow-up reminders, what else can they do? One strategy is to establish personal contact with parents. Having the parent coordinator, teachers, or parent volunteers call parents to tell them about the workshop and to extend a personal invitation is a very powerful motivator for some parents. One thing is for certain: Even when attendance is low, you can usually bet that the parents who did attend felt that the time was well-spent. And this will be reflected in the ways they interact with their children and in future home-learning opportunities they provide for their children. Finally, it is important for teachers and principals to keep in mind a point that was made in Chapter 1: we mustn't confuse *involvement* with *attendance*.

SUMMARY

"*The parent is the child's most important teacher*" has become a saying—a cliché—popular among educators who aspire to the creation of strong home-school partnerships. It is time for schools to recognize, not only through their words but also through their actions, that parents *are indeed* their child's most important teacher. In this chapter we have described ways that schools can provide opportunities for parents to acquire skills and strategies they can use to help their children learn. We have shared guidelines and suggestions for creating parent spaces and centers, for utilizing print and video resources, for developing home-learning activities, and for planning and implementing parent meetings and workshops. We have also stressed the need for follow-up of parent education opportunities to assist parents in their efforts at applying newly gained strategies.

Parent education *does* make a difference! Even parents who were only marginally involved can begin to see that working with their child can be a very pleasant and productive experience. More importantly, teachers begin to see that there is a wealth of support and help available from parents—if we can find a way to tap into it.

In the chapters that follow we will continue to emphasize the importance of parents as teachers as we discuss home visits, parent conferencing, and other activities that constitute a strong parent involvement program. Before turning to the next chapter, you may want to take a few moments to consider the questions listed below. These questions are designed to help you think about your beliefs with respect to parent education.

For your consideration . . .

1. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers.
   Yes/No
2. The school has a role in helping parents become better teachers of their children.
   Yes/No
3. Some of the school's resources should go toward providing parent education opportunities.
   Yes/No

4. Teachers should give parents strategies they can use to help their children learn.
   Yes/No
5. A variety of parent education opportunities should exist.
   Yes/No
6. Planned follow-up for parent education offerings should be provided to assist parents in applying strategies learned.
   Yes/No

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Chapter 7

The "Whys" and "Hows" of Home Visiting

A note from Kathy . . .
Preservice teachers—particularly those in our early childhood program—are more nervous about home visiting than about any other aspect of their future teaching assignments. They are apprehensive about what might await them behind those closed doors, and they question their own ability to interact face-to-face with families—on their own "turf." In this chapter we hope to ease some of these fears and provide information that will help teachers and administrators feel confident in their abilities to accept the challenges that a home-visiting program brings.

During recent years we have seen a renewed interest in home-visiting. It is estimated that as many as two hundred thousand children and families each year are enrolled in home-visiting programs funded through a variety of public and private sources, including the federal Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (Gomby et al. 1993). Commissions such as the National Governors' Association and the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect have advocated establishment of additional home-visiting programs. And in 1993 President Clinton signed legislation authorizing more than one billion dollars for family preservation and support services, services that include home-visiting.

Home-visiting programs differ in goals, services offered, and in strategies used to achieve their goals and deliver services. They also vary as to the kinds of families served. Some programs, such as Head Start and most state-funded prekindergarten programs, have a number of mandatory home visits for all families of children enrolled, while other programs, such as Missouri's Parents as Teachers program, offer home visits on a voluntary basis to all families with children in a certain age group. Some programs are only available for families of children with special needs, some are designed for teenaged parents, while others only accept families with low socioeconomic status. Services offered through home-visiting programs include, but are not limited to, prevention of poor birth outcomes, prevention of child abuse and neglect, enhanced child development, and support to families of special-needs children. It is the last two of these services that fall into the realm of early childhood education;

we will therefore limit our discussion of home-visiting to programs that seek to provide services related to promoting children's cognitive, social, and motor development.

Although differences exist, researchers have identified some common characteristics of successful home-visiting programs (Gomby et al. 1993; Olds and Kitzman 1993; Ramey and Ramey 1993). These include the provision of multiple services, use of professionals, and program duration of at least four visits. Further, families from higher-risk populations with multiple needs tend to benefit more from home-visiting programs than families who are able to help themselves without outside intervention. From this research, experts recommend that the following guidelines be applied to the planning and implementation of new home-visiting programs (Gomby et al. 1993). Home-visiting programs should

- Address the needs of both children and parents by direct service or by referral.
- Be flexible with regard to frequency, intensity, and duration of visits.
- Be sensitive to the unique needs and circumstances of the families served and should avoid rigid, formulaic strategies found in packaged child development and/or parenting programs.
- Utilize the services of well-trained, dedicated professionals.
- Engage in continuous evaluation.
- Set realistic goals and expectations.

Home visitations have been a part of early childhood programs for many years. In the 1960s and 1970s, home-visiting was a part of early intervention programs for children with special needs (Powell 1990), and in 1972 Home Start, a program within Head Start, was created to provide health, educational, and social services to children and their families (Zigler and Freedman 1987). This program was followed by others, such as the Perry Preschool Project (Berreuta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, et al. 1984), the Mother-Child Home Program (Levenstein 1988), and the Portage Project (Shearer 1987). Today, home visits are also part of newer programs such as the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) introduced in the United States in 1984 with the help of the National Council for Jewish Women. Other programs include the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, an adaptation of the parent education model developed by Burton White (Pfannenstiel and Seltzer 1989), Hawaii's Healthy Start program (Breakey et al. 1991), and the federal Even Start program first funded in 1989, to name a few of the many programs that have home-visiting as a major component.

These programs all target families of young children and provide early childhood education to promote school readiness. Emphasizing various developmental stages and age-appropriate activities for language, intellectual, social, and motor development, the home visitor models strategies and works with parents to plan and implement home-learning activities between visits.

Researchers have assessed a variety of outcomes of home-visiting programs (Gomby et al. 1993). Benefits include positive changes in the interaction of parents with their children, positive adaptations to the home environment, and benefits in cognitive, behavioral, and motor development of the children served. Results of the Perry Preschool Project indicate that these benefits may persist throughout the grades. In longitudinal studies of the effects of the program on youths through age nineteen, evidence suggests decreased rates of enrollment in special-education classes, increased rates of high school graduation, higher monthly earnings, and lower rates of arrest.

Long-term cost benefits were realized through reductions in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and food stamp payments. An analysis of Perry Preschool Program youths at age nineteen revealed a return of $1.47 for every tax dollar spent to deliver services (Berreuta-Clement et al. 1984). Another follow-up study of participants at age twenty-seven indicates a cost return of $7.16 for every dollar spent, largely the result of reductions in crime (Barnett 1993).

Home-visiting in communities where parents are generally reluctant or unable to come to school or participate in school activities serves to foster cooperation and forge bonds between teachers and parents. As teachers reach out to parents, parents begin to view schools as less threatening places, and parents are more inclined to reciprocate by becoming involved in school activities (Nielson 1991). Traveling to different homes also affords the opportunity for teachers to discover resources for curriculum enrichment. Parents find it easier to come to school if they have already shared with the teacher a particular interest or ability such as gardening, carpentry, sewing, or preparing ethnic foods (Fox-Barnett and Meyer 1992).

Designing Home-Visiting Programs

The ultimate goal of most home-visiting programs associated with early childhood education is to involve and encourage parents in the development and education of their children. This is often accomplished through improved parenting competence. A key element in designing effective home-visiting programs is identifying desired goals and anticipated outcomes. Will the primary focus be on the child, the parent, or both? Is the primary goal to increase parental skill and confidence in working with their child or to provide direct service to the child? Answers to these and other questions will provide direction to the school or district seeking to establish a home-visiting program.

Another key element involves identification of the population to be served. Most programs associated with public and private elementary schools focus on children from birth to age five. Home visits, however, have been a successful part of the school experience for youngsters throughout the grades (Nielson 1991; Malanowski and Wene 1982; Hawthorne 1984). Home-visiting may also be offered to special populations within the school or district, such as to families of children enrolled in a prekindergarten, special-education, transition, or remedial program.

Once the goals and outcomes of the program and the target population have been identified, consideration can be given to services to be provided. While many programs provide a variety of services, most home-visiting programs associated with public and private elementary schools primarily offer services to enhance child development and/or parenting skills. At the same time, home visitors for these programs are generally well-informed as to organizations and agencies providing a wide range of services and can take advantage of opportunities to inform parents as to the availability of these services.

The services to be provided will generally dictate the staff qualifications needed and, sometimes, the schedule. If paraprofessionals are to be employed as home visitors, experts strongly recommend that they be given extensive training and that they work under the direction of a professional. Sometimes a parent coordinator with a degree in education, counseling, psychology, social work, or a closely related field is hired to oversee the home-visiting program. This individual may conduct home visits and/or train and support other teachers or paraprofessionals working with the program. In most of the Illinois prekindergarten programs, regularly scheduled home visits are conducted by each child's teacher. Some programs are designed with a classroom or center-based program that meets two or three days a week, with the remaining days devoted to home visits. Other programs are entirely home-based or classroom-based with periodic home visits scheduled during the year. The length of each home visit varies from program to program; however, the average visit ranges from thirty to ninety minutes.

Some home visits have as their primary purpose the establishment of relationships with people in the home. For these home visits, content is not an issue, since the visit is not one that includes goals related to child development and/or parent education. When the goals do include child development and/or parent education, the content and methods to be used in the home-visiting program should, ideally, be individualized to accommodate the needs and characteristics of the children and families served. Powell (1990, 70) offers these questions concerning individualization of content and methods: (1) What dimensions of child, parent, and/or family functioning will be used to guide content and methods of home visits? (2) To what extent will formal and/or informal procedures be used to determine needed directions in the home visit? (3) Will there be systematic efforts to uncover parents' views on childrearing, family strengths and needs, and preferences for the nature of home visits? (4) In what ways will parents be involved in making decisions about the content and method of home visits? In some programs a standard curriculum exists, and home visitors perform the same activities with all of the families. In other programs home visitors select from the standard curriculum activities that appear to address needs of each individual family. And in still other programs the parents, together with the home visitor, develop goals and select activities they feel will be of most benefit. The activities selected may or may not come from a standard curriculum. The latter strategy provides opportunity for the parent to help the teacher understand the family's goals, needs, and culture (Terdan 1992).

Characteristics and Responsibilities of the Home Visitor

Ideally, the relationship between the home visitor and the parent will be one of collaboration and partnership, rather than one of expert and novice. J. Q. Adams, a professor of education specializing in cultural diversity at Western Illinois University, advises teachers to "assume a neighbor persona" when visiting with parents. He asks teachers to visualize a continuum with the "novice" at the far right end and "expert" at the left. In the middle is "neighbor." Adams suggests that the "neighbor" persona represents the best role for teachers and parents to assume. Approaching parents as an expert sometimes reinforces the old barriers and negative feelings that some parents still harbor about school. On the other hand the home visitor is a professional and should conduct herself or himself as such. The teacher serving as a home visitor is *not* a close friend nor is he or she a social worker or counselor. Assuming these roles often leads to problems that are counterproductive to the relationship. The home visitor is not there to "fix" the family. While they may benefit from some alternatives and ideas, families must choose their own solutions. Similarly, the home visitor should not be seen as a "babysitter" or a "confidant." Friendliness is important, but the home visitor is not the friend to turn to for free babysitting or marital advice. In Figure 7.1 is an annotated listing of other common pitfalls to avoid in working with families in a home-visiting program.

In a partnership relationship, both parent and home visitor are sometimes novices, sometimes experts. Both have equal status in shaping the goals and outcomes of the program as they manifest themselves in this particular situation.

Besides the obvious understanding of child development and early childhood education, the home visitor *must* have excellent interpersonal communication skills and the ability to relate to each family in light of its own culture, circumstances, and values. Coursework in counseling, psychology, and cultural diversity can greatly benefit a teacher who has not had an opportunity to gain some knowledge and skill in these areas. Personal characteristics such as warmth, friendliness, and a sincere desire to help others are also necessary. A nonjudgmental attitude is absolutely essential, as is a strict adherence to confidentiality. Home visitors are, by their very nature, visitors in another's

PITFALLS TO AVOID IN WORKING WITH FAMILIES

Assuming Responsibility for the Family

It is important that you foster independence rather than dependence. Your role is to model developmentally appropriate practices and provide support to enable the family members to apply these practices in the future.

Imposing Personal Values on the Family

We must respect the right of each individual to have his or her own value system. If a family's values conflict with yours, try to talk honestly and openly about the differences without conveying disapproval for the values of the family. We can share our ideas as "another way," but the family must make its own choices, and we must respect its right to do so. It is important to convey the message that "It's okay to disagree. . . . We can still work together."

Becoming a "Friend" Rather than Simply Being "Friendly"

This is a professional relationship. Although friendliness is important to good relationship–building, being viewed as a "friend" can be counterproductive. Your role is not to babysit, loan money, provide transportation to social or non-school activities, etc.

Trying to "Fix" the Family

Family members may require your assistance in helping them assess their own needs and may benefit from your sharing alternatives and ideas. However, they must learn to determine their own needs and to seek their own solutions. It is counterproductive to tell the family what you see that's wrong—and how to fix it.

Stereotyping Families and Family Members

Families are unique and possess varying strengths and needs. We must seek to identify the individual characteristics that make up each family and attempt to meet each "where they are."

Trying to Be All-Knowing/All-Seeing

In other words, we cannot be all things to all people. We can be a support person, a resource person, and a link to other agencies and professionals in the community where other services can be obtained.

Failing to Deal with the Whole Family

Extended families, live-in relatives, and other individuals often play a critical role in the family. It is important to come to know the roles that these individuals play within the family.

Figure 7.1 *(Continued on next page)*

Presenting a Narrow Range of Options

Although we can't be all-knowing, we can familiarize ourselves with a wide variety of agencies, services, and professionals available in the community.

Becoming Impatient

Changing attitudes and behaviors that have developed over many years takes time. Expecting change too quickly can lead to frustration for you, as well as for the family.

Inconsistency

The family must be able to trust that you will follow through on commitments and that you genuinely have their best interests at heart. Consistency is important to maintaining a good working relationship with the family.

Lack of Accurate Information

The information and assistance you provide must be accurate and complete. If you do not know the answer to a question, say that you don't know, find out, and get back to the family with the answer. Don't give inaccurate information. It is your responsibility to remain up-to-date on child development, parenting, and community resources.

Failure to Refer When Additional Help Is Needed

In very troubled or disturbed family situations, assistance intervention and treatment from professional, psychiatric, or protective services may be necessary. Get assistance from your supervisor before making these decisions and referrals. Educators are mandated reporters of child abuse or neglect, and under penalty of law must report any suspected cases of abuse or neglect.

Violating Confidentiality Rights

Any and all information about the family is strictly confidential and cannot be shared with your own family or friends. Information may be shared with others in your agency or system, if necessary for you to provide the best service for the family. It is a good practice to ***not*** promise a family that you will not tell ***anyone*** something they have revealed. It may be necessary to do so in order to help the family.

Figure 7.1 *(continued)*

home. A visitor maintains a pleasant demeanor, accepts hospitality as it is offered, and, in general, behaves as one would wish a guest to behave in one's own home.

Oftentimes trust has to be built before parents are willing or able to open their homes to program personnel. In some circumstances home visits occur in the yard outside the home or at a nearby fast-food restaurant. This is perfectly acceptable if a parent is hesitant or unwilling to have the teacher see the inside of the home. One way that home visitors build trust is by sharing their enthusiasm for working with the child and by recognizing the efforts that parents are making. It is important for the teacher to convey a sincere trust in the parents' desire and willingness to be a good parent. Comments such as "Larry looks so healthy! It's clear that you are meeting his nutritional needs" or "Miriam always looks so clean and neat!" offered in a sincere manner let parents know that you notice how they care for their child. Home visitors are also conscious of their own personal appearance when visiting with parents. Wearing informal attire, such as clean slacks and a pullover or shirt is generally preferred, since overdressing tends to project an image of a "teacher" or "expert" rather than of a "neighbor" and may make some parents self-conscious about their own dress.

Planning Home Visits

Planning for a home visit depends on the goals of the program. Home visits have been held to teach parents effective strategies for working with their children, for bringing educational toys and materials into the home, and simply for establishing a relationship between home and school. *Child-centered home visits* have as their purpose spending some time together with the child in the home environment and helping the parent and child feel good about themselves (Fox-Barnett and Meyer 1992). The teacher asks each parent for permission to visit the child, explaining that home visits afford an opportunity for parents, children, and teacher to get to know one another better. An exact schedule should be agreed upon, with five to ten minutes allowed for greetings and the next twenty or thirty minutes devoted to interaction with the child. The teacher is a "visitor" in the child's home, rather than a "parent educator," and as such encourages the child and parents to communicate more about themselves. Children may plan the visit, deciding where the teacher will sit and what the course of events will be. They often have a special toy or other favored object to share with the teacher during the home visit. There is usually follow-up in the classroom as teacher and child share the experience with the rest of the children. As described by Fox-Barnett and Meyer, the child-centered home visit is not a teaching time nor is it a time to help or counsel the family. If questions from the family do arise, a separate time can be arranged for getting back together, or the teacher can make the appropriate referral. The child-centered home visit is really a time for parents, teachers, and children to communicate without institutional barriers. As Fox-Barnett and Meyer state, "If the visit is not judgmental, instructional, or critical, but is open, informal, and characterized by careful listening on the teacher's part, the parents may feel that school is a more approachable place should they need help in the future" (48).

In a home-visiting program where child development and/or parent education is the purpose, the home visitor will probably begin with a child-centered visit in order to build a relationship with the family. Chatting with family members about their daily routine, interests, hobbies, and jobs is a good way to begin. You might ask parents what they like to do when they are "child-free." Informal conversation with the parent as to the family's expectations for the program and, sometimes, the use of a survey instrument or questionnaire are helpful next steps. Figure 7.2 is an example of a survey similar to one used in a Head Start center. The survey was adapted for use in a public school prekindergarten program.

Any information gained through assessments and screening devices should be taken into consideration as goals for the home visits are developed. Once

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HOMEVISITING PROGRAM SURVEY

What do you expect from this program? Please indicate whether each item below is "very important," "somewhat important," or "not important" for your child or for you as a parent.

1. What do you expect this program to do for your child?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Devolop social skills (learn to get along with others)	________	________	________
Develop self-confidence	________	________	________
Help prepare child for success in school	________	________	________
Develop motor skills	________	________	________
Develop language skills	________	________	________

2. What do you expect this program to do for you, a parent?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Understand more about your child's development	________	________	________
Understand what your child is doing at school	________	________	________
Gain ideas for helping your child prepare for success in school	________	________	________
Get acquainted with other parents and teachers	________	________	________
Become aware of services available to you and your family	________	________	________

Figure 7.2

expectations have been shared and a consensus has been reached as to the goals of the program, the home visitor might suggest a routine or format for the visits, soliciting input from the parent. The home visitor might also give examples of the types of materials and activities available to bring into the home. From there, the home visitor and parent can devise a schedule and a tentative agenda for the first few visits. Some programs do ask that parents sign a contract agreeing to be present at the agreed-upon times, to participate in the home visits, and to engage in follow-up activities with their child in between home visits. Other paperwork is sometimes a part of the program, but the home visitor should not let it get in the way of, or take precedence over, interaction with the parent and child. After the visit is over, the home visitor should take a few moments alone to write out an anecdotal record (an account of what took place during the visit—what was done and said). This record should focus on the progress made and include any strengths in evidence during the visit. It should also contain notes about any problems discussed or encountered, as well as requests that require follow-up. Finally, the anecdotal record should provide insight as to future planning for home visits.

Once the visits are underway, a typical visit might begin with the teacher chatting informally with the parent and child about the activities they have been engaged in since the last visit. The teacher may want to provide a toy, book, or activity for the child while the parent and teacher briefly review the goals and plans set for this visit. Next, the teacher could introduce the new toys and materials, modeling with the child how to use each one, and explaining for the parent the value of each. Sometimes the parent may try out an activity with the child while the teacher observes and offers suggestions. After discussing any questions the parent may have, the teacher asks about other needs or goals and, with input from the parent, revises or establishes plans for the next visit. There may be a form for the parent and teacher to fill out together or one that the teacher leaves for the parent to fill out during the week. After goodbyes to the child and the parent, the teacher departs.

Barriers to Home Visits

In Chapter 2 we discussed barriers to effective parent involvement. Barriers included lack of communication, cultural and language differences, negative feelings that some parents harbor about schools, negative attitudes of some teachers and principals, and time constraints, to name a few. All of these barriers and more can stand in the way of effective home visits. Many teachers are understandably reluctant to conduct home visits. Reasons for their reluctance vary; they include lack of confidence in communicating with parents in their own homes, concern about cultural and language differences, concern about perceived conflicts in family values and childrearing practices, and concern over personal safety, to name a few of the major concerns stated by teachers. Some teachers need to conduct home visits with a "partner." The partner is typically a fellow teacher, though it may also be a parent educator, school counselor, or a volunteer parent mentor. The parent should understand in advance who will be visiting in the home with the teacher, and the role of the partner should be clarified. When language differences exist, having a fellow parent who speaks the home language can be especially advantageous. If such a person is not available, the teacher may try contacting someone in the community, perhaps the minister of a church in the area. This person would, ideally, be someone familiar to the family and who is well-respected in the community. Sharing the goals of the program with this individual and enlisting his or her support and assistance can often help school personnel gain entry into homes of parents who would otherwise be very reluctant, if not unwilling, to participate.

It is important that administrators and teachers understand the concerns that parents have about home-visiting (Terdan 1992). The biggest concern that most parents have is that the teacher will *judge* them. They worry that the teacher will not approve of their housekeeping, their furniture, or the toys they have for their children. Some parents fear that the teacher will question their childrearing methods or try to tell them what to do. Others worry about the time that a home visit will take and about the expectations the teacher may have for the parent's involvement in educational activities. And still other parents are so concerned about such pressing problems as finances, health, job loss, or a family member's substance abuse that they fear they can't concentrate on child development or parenting issues at this point in their lives. All of these concerns are real, and in order for a home-visiting program to work, they must be addressed. The person most suitable for addressing these concerns is the home visitor. Establishing a relationship with each family is a must, and this can only be done if teachers are willing to reach out and meet families where they are.

While some families reject the idea of a teacher coming into their home, they may agree to meet at a favorite place of interest to the child, such as a park or fast-food restaurant. The child can be asked to bring along a favorite toy. Terdan (1992) talks about going on home visits with a family who liked to take long walks. The leisurely walk provided an excellent opportunity for relaxed conversations and for modeling language skills by pointing out new things to the children and expanding on the observations they made about something they saw. If parents refuse to participate at all in the program, you might try to provide options: biweekly rather than weekly visits, for example. Or perhaps another family member, such as an aunt or grandparent, might participate in the home visit until the parent feels able to do so. Another option might be to have the parent and child visit with the teacher in the classroom. Finally, the teacher might offer to drop off materials at the home, or at another agreed upon location, and spend just five or ten minutes explaining each. This option might lead to the parent's initiating longer sessions by asking questions or discussing the child's involvement in and reaction to the various materials and activities. In time, when a relationship is built and trust is formed, the parent may agree to a regular program of home-visiting.

SUMMARY

Home-visiting has the potential for dramatically improving communication between the home and school, particularly in situations that involve hard-to-reach parents. Benefits of home-visiting also include parents' increased use of educational strategies with their children, improved parent-child communication, and enhanced child development that impacts future school experiences. In this chapter we have shared information related to the design and implementation of home-visiting programs. We have also attempted to describe some of the concerns parents and teachers have about home-visiting. As stated by Terdan (1992): "Become an interested and appropriately involved friend of the family. This leads to a natural and positive interchange with parents" (2).

A note from Kathy. . .

Becky Oliver, a first-grade teacher in Jacksonville, Illinois, tells parents that she isn't coming to judge their housekeeping—that she isn't a very good housekeeper herself! When asked about the conditions she encounters in the homes she visits, she talks about the roaches she has seen climbing up the walls and about the parents' embarrassment over not being able to get rid of them. Becky is true to her word: She doesn't judge parents. She empathizes with them about their problems and then focuses her attention on their child, the most important person in the room. Because of her willingness to reach out to parents, they are supportive of her program and subsequently become more involved in their child's education.

Following are several questions about home-visiting programs. Answering these questions should help you determine how closely your beliefs reflect the recommendatons cited for effective home-visiting programs.

For your consideration . . .

1. Home-visiting programs should address the needs of both children and parents by direct service or by referral.
   Yes/No
2. Home-visiting programs should be flexible with regard to frequency, intensity, and duration of visits.
   Yes/No

3. Home-visiting programs should be sensitive to the unique needs and circumstances of the families served and should avoid rigid, formulaic strategies found in packaged child development and/or parenting programs.
   Yes/No
4. Home-visiting programs should utilize well-trained, dedicated professionals.
   Yes/No
5. Home-visiting programs should set realistic goals and expectations.
   Yes/No
6. Home-visiting programs should engage in continuous evaluation.
   Yes/No

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Chapter 8

Assessment and the Reporting of Pupil Progress

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Oakwood, like most schools, faces the grading dilemma. Pressure comes from some parents who say they want grades . . . and from teachers who feel that children won't be motivated to work hard if they are not given a grade. At the same time there are parents who complain that they don't get enough information about their child's progress, and teachers who feel that traditional grading procedures and report cards do not fit the way they instruct children in their classrooms. Do we keep giving children grades simply because "that's the way we've always done it?" Or do we begin to develop alternative reporting strategies that reflect the growth each child actually achieves and that give parents more information than simply A, B, C, D, or F?

The faculty at Oakwood School has worked diligently to face the issues surrounding assessment, evaluation, grading, and reporting of pupil progress. Because classroom curriculum is developmentally appropriate for each child, and evaluation of each child's progress is based on the growth that the child achieves, grades no longer fit the instructional practices used. After much deliberation the staff adopted a set of guiding principles that served to shape new assessment and reporting procedures. This chapter is organized around these principles, with a variety of examples provided to illustrate how each is manifested within the overall assessment and reporting process. Additional examples used in other districts have also been included, as appropriate.

Assessment and Evaluation Must Be Based on the Child's Performance

We wholeheartedly believe that evaluation of children must be *authentic* and *performance-based.* That is, evaluation must be based on what each child can *do*, rather than on an averaging of scores from tests and worksheets. At Oakwood, evaluation of pupil progress is based on a thorough analysis of performance samples collected over time. This collection of data, observation notes, and artifacts represents the knowledge and skills the child has acquired and can apply to his or her work. Teachers collect this information, record it, and share it with parents. To facilitate ongoing assessment and evaluation, teachers at Oakwood keep monitoring books, a looseleaf notebook containing a section for each child. The teachers record observations of each child's oral and written language responses, as well as social behaviors exhibited.

Children are asked to keep artifacts—samples of their work—in portfolios. Work placed in a student's portfolio may include a piece of art or a photograph of a piece of art completed by the student, a story or report written by the student, assessment sheets for theme projects showing scores—and, in some cases, grades—for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and content, as well as math quizzes, to name a few of the many artifacts. Students also include narratives telling why a particular piece was included in the portfolio. Since most parents do not associate portfolios with assessment of progress in the elementary grades, teachers educate parents as to the purpose of portfolios and how they serve as a strategy for learning. Parents need to know that a portfolio is more than a collection of student work (Freed 1993). At Oakwood, parents are shown how the portfolio process assists children in learning how to self-evaluate their own work, noting their own strengths and areas of need. Portfolios help students set goals for future growth, and they are truly an "autobiography of the student's learning" (Freed 1993). Although parents do not need extensive training in portfolio assessment, they do need an awareness of the educational philosophy that supports the use of portfolios as a learning and assessment tool.

During regularly scheduled evaluation periods, teachers review all of the information and artifacts collected over a period of time, analyze each child's progress, and record the information on checklists shared with parents. These checklists were developed by teachers at each grade level and are specific to what is being taught each quarter. The checklists reflect the curriculum, so that what is taught is assessed. Teachers indicate on the checklist whether children have "demonstrated" or "not demonstrated" a particular understanding or skill in their work. In this way ongoing assessment and periodic summative evaluation informs the curriculum and subsequent instruction. In Figure 8.1 is an example of the midterm evaluation checklist developed for use with fourth-grade students. The categories Effective Communicator, Self-directed Learner, Collaborative Worker, Community Contributor, Quality Producer, and Complex Thinker reflect an emphasis on what students are learning to *do*. The emphasis is on students as productive members of society *now*, rather than on student's preparation for a role to be assumed ten years from now. There is also an emphasis on the development of *attitudes* and *behaviors* representative of a self-directed, responsible, and enthusiastic learner.

Written comments from teachers help to clarify and personalize the checklists. In Figure 8.2 is a copy of the checklist developed by the fifth-grade teachers. The teacher involved here has provided several concrete examples of the student's performance, as well as some suggestions for improvement.

Fourth Grade
Mid Term Evaluation

Name____________________________Grade__________Date__________

Evaluation Code: 1 rarely demonstrated 2. sometimes demonstrated 3. often demonstrated

Effective Communicator

Demonstrates an understanding of the writing process.	
Demonstrates application of the following writing traits. (idea/content, organization, voice, effective word choice).	
Demonstrates the following writing conventions: (Uses complete sentences, uses correct punctuation, revises spelling errors)	
Asks questions to extend and clarify learning.	
Participates in discussions.	
Follows directions.	
Understands what is read.	
Demonstrates positive reading attitude.	
Manages information by demonstrating use of study and reference skills.	
Carries out research to conclusions. (Note taking, organizing information, final draft)	
Speaks audibly and distinctly. Presents points in logical order.	
Interacts with audience.	

Self-directed Learner

Eagerly accepts a challenge	
Uses work time productively	
Demonstrates self control	
Plans, organizes, and carries a task to completion	
Demonstrates organizational skills	
Demonstrates interest, curiosity, inventiveness	
Makes responsible choices independently	
Considers a variety of alternatives when solving problems.	
Monitors and evaluates progress.	

Collaborative Worker

Cooperates with others	
Contributes to group work	
Appreciates diversity in others	
Respects the rights and properties of others.	

Community Contributor

Locates places on the Earth	
Explores the Earth's regions	
Explores the Earth's history	
Investigates human efforts in the environment	

Quality Producer

Uses available technology to assist learning	
Creates products which reflect high standards and originality	
Expresses enjoyment after achievement	

Complex Thinker

Demonstrates a positive attitude toward problem situations	
Formulates reasonable predictions	
Applies mathematical procedures: (Adds, subtracts, mutiplies, divides, measures)	
Uses one or more methods to verify results	
Uses specific vocabulary	
Asks question to clarify and extend learning.	

Parent Signature____________________________

Parent Comment

Figure 8.1

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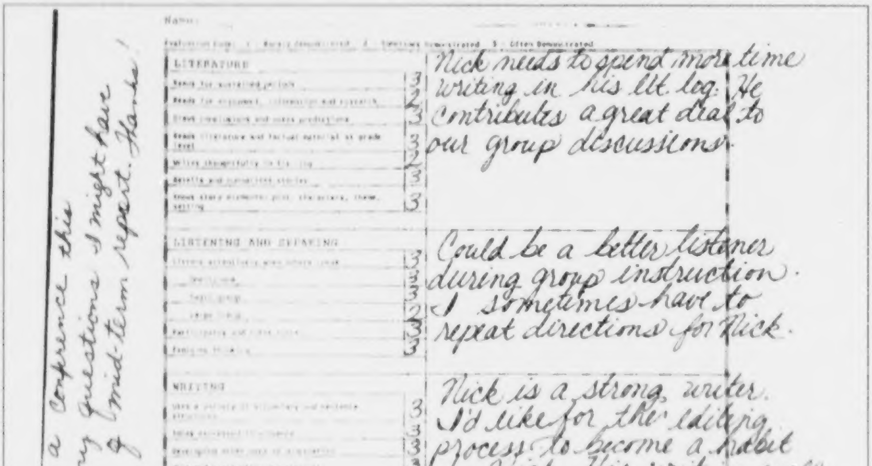
The teachers ask the parents to sign, signifying their review of the checklist. This parent has included a note in the margin expressing approval for this new reporting device.

Other evaluative reports are sent home periodically. For example, teachers typically send home evaluation forms used to evaluate a final project. The skills to be evaluated through any given project vary, with all skills being checked periodically as students engage in authentic learning activities. Figure 8.3 is a copy of the evaluation form used for one of the theme projects completed by students in Carol Brandt's third-grade classroom. Students' projects were evaluated for content and mechanics. On this form are skills such as sentence clarity, paragraph structure, and punctuation that students were



I guess we don't need a conference this time. You've answered any questions I might have had. I like this type of mid-term report. Thanks! Marilyn

Name:

LITERATURE

Nick needs to spend more time writing in his lit. log. He contributes a great deal to our group discussions.

LISTENING AND SPEAKING

Could be a better listener during group instruction. I sometimes have to repeat directions for Nick.

WRITING

Nick is a strong writer. I'd like for the editing process to become a habit for Nick. His writing will improve if he can find his own errors.

THEME STUDY

Theme study seems to be new for Nick. He is doing quality research. Will improve with writing process.

MATH

Could be ahead in math. Not motivated to move on. (very capable!)

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Needs to be a more organized student and all areas would improve.

PARENT COMMENTS:

PARENT SIGNATURE

Let me know if you would like to come in for a conference. I'm enjoying having Nick in class. Thank you

Figure 8.2

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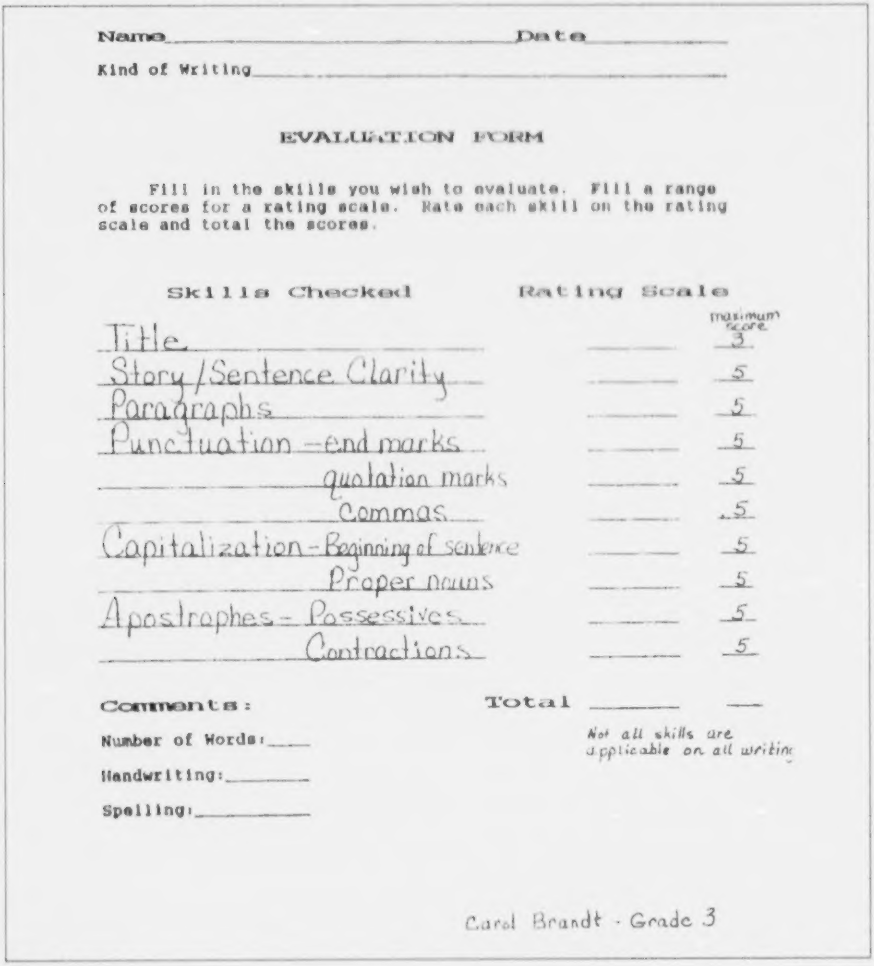
expected to apply in their written project. Having this information can help parents be better teachers of their children. When parents are informed about what the teacher is looking for in terms of evaluation, they become aware of what to look for and where they can help.

Evaluation Must Inform Parents of the Developmental Level of the Child

Teachers provide work that fits each child's needs and abilities; they provide time and opportunity to grow. Children are then evaluated according to their individual abilities and levels of development. Because children are allowed to work at their level—a level that may be well below that of the typical child in the same grade—reporting progress can be very tricky. Parents, reflecting on their own school experiences and past report cards, can misunderstand



Name____________________ Date__________

Kind of Writing____________________________

EVALUATION FORM

Fill in the skills you wish to evaluate. Fill a range of scores for a rating scale. Rate each skill on the rating scale and total the scores.

Skills Checked	Rating Scale	maximum score
Title		3
Story / Sentence Clarity		5
Paragraphs		5
Punctuation – end marks		5
quotation marks		5
commas		5
Capitalization – Beginning of sentence		5
Proper nouns		5
Apostrophes – Possessives		5
Contractions		5
Total		

Not all skills are applicable on all writin

Comments:

Number of Words:____

Handwriting:_______

Spelling:_________

Carol Brandt - Grade 3

Figure 8.3

when a teacher says that their child—a child functioning below grade level—is showing growth. Reporting procedures that indicate satisfactory progress in all areas, without clearly portraying the individual child's placement in the program, can be terribly misleading to parents, particularly if the child is later referred for special services or performs poorly on a state or district-mandated standardized test. Similarly, when these students go into middle and high schools where grades are still very much the norm, parents and students need to be prepared for a reporting process based on a comparison standard. To simply eliminate grades as a means of reporting student progress would cause tremendous turmoil among parents and educators—unless a system was already in place for showing growth in each child, while at the same time communicating levels and ranges of development.

Oftentimes a checklist can be designed in such a way as to help parents see the developmental progression of a particular concept or skill. On Carol Davis's spelling development checklist (see Figure 8.4), children's progress is noted under the stage evidenced most consistently at the time the report is sent. By reading about each stage, the parent can easily see where their child is with respect to progress toward the development of conventional spelling ability.

As was shown in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, reports to parents need to address not only skills and concepts but also those areas of work habits and social/emo-

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DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING PROGRESS SHEET

NAME:

DATE:

Uses random letters to represent sounds in words:

Uses initial consonants to represent whole words:

Uses initial and final consonants for each word:

Uses initial, final, and medial consonants for each word:

Consonants and vowels used in correct position, but substitutes vowels:

Approaching conventional spelling:

Figure 8.4

tional development that play a large part in the child's reasons for success. Reports also need to include a place for narrative evaluations. When checklists are too detailed and lengthy, parents tend not to read them carefully; and sometimes what needs to be said cannot be conveyed in checklist format. Written comments are especially helpful in these circumstances. Teachers often indicate the level of development through written comments such as "While your child is making progress, he is not showing the amount of growth that is expected of students at this grade level." Although this information has been shared in face-to-face conferences, written documentation via the evaluation report is necessary.

Parents can also be helped to understand the range of development evidenced by students in a particular grade or class by viewing examples of student work. Displays set up during Open Houses and at parent meetings give parents a chance to see projects produced by other students. In addition, many teachers videotape student presentations and make the video available for parents to check out. Other teachers send home classroom "books" with entries by each child in the class. Parents have an opportunity to read each entry and to comment on the collection of writings. All of these are ways for teachers to help parents recognize the level at which their child is currently performing.

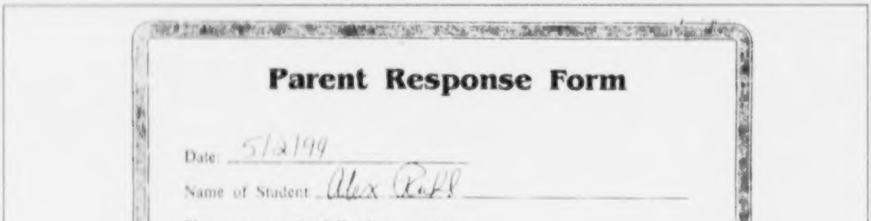
Parent education offerings and parent-teacher conferences represent other avenues for teachers to use to help parents understand what constitutes a "normal" range of growth and development, as well as understand the need to allow each child to progress at his or her individual pace. An understanding of developmental appropriateness as it relates to curriculum and to assessment and evaluation is also extremely important.

Assessment and Evaluation Must Include Input from the Student

When children are asked to evaluate their own ability to apply the skills and concepts they are being taught, a conscious awareness develops, and children begin to take more responsibility for their own learning. Oakwood teachers ask for input from children in many different ways. Many times children are asked to evaluate themselves on writing skills evidenced as they progress through each stage of the writing process: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing/sharing. They are also asked to evaluate their performance in a variety of settings: whole group, small cooperative group, literature study group, individual oral presentation, and so forth. Before an evaluation sheet goes home, teachers ask children to write a letter to their parents explaining what the parents will see on the evaluation form. Students also write letters to explain to their parents what they have included in their performance portfolios. Students evaluate what goes in their portfolios, explaining why they chose each item and what it showed they knew.

Students also need to be allowed to share their portfolio with parents. At Oakwood, students take their portfolio home periodically and share its contents and their letter with their families. The teacher sends home a note to parents, telling them when the child will be bringing home the portfolio and asking that they go through it with their son or daughter, ask questions about the items included, and then fill out a written "Parent Response Form." Because the portfolios are part of the day-to-day instructional program, children are expected to bring the portfolio back to school on the following day. In Figure 8.5 is a sample of a "Parent Response Form." The parents commented on their surprise at the child's improvement: "We did not really notice the improvement in Alex's work until we saw it side-by-side." They also mentioned that their child had turned his portfolio showing into a "family meeting." What a wonderful opportunity for building self-esteem and pride in one's accomplishments!

In Becky Oliver's first-grade classroom in Jacksonville, Illinois, children and their families are invited to a "portfolio party" at the end of the school year. One child brought almost his entire extended family! Parents, grandparents, and an aunt were present to examine the portfolio and to compare progress made by the child throughout the year. Portfolio-sharing reaps many benefits, especially when children are actively involved in the process of evaluating and reporting their own progress.



Parent Response Form

Date: 5/2/99

Name of Student: Alex Ruff

Please answer the following questions:

Did your child review the portfolio with you? yes

What part of the portfolio did you like best? Seeing the differences between Kindergarten & first grades.

Did your child's progress come as a surprise to you? Why? Yes We did not really notice the improvement in Alex's work until we saw it side by side.

Do you have questions about anything in the portfolio?
No but we found it very enjoyable! Alex turned the showing into a family meeting

I have reviewed the portfolio and am returning it with this form.

R. Elizabeth Ruff Gregory W. Ruff
Parent

#145 Portfolio Assessment 74 © 1992 Teacher Created Materials, Inc.

Figure 8.5

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Patrick, a first grader, wanted to practice on me before he shared his portfolio with his parents. "First, I'll start with the kindergarten stuff, then 'Voila!' I'll show them what I have from the first grade. It's going to blow them away!" If the parents are wise, their response to Patrick's presentation will have a huge positive impact on Patrick's future school performance.

Some schools ask students to fill out surveys designed to get students to think about themselves as learners—their strengths and their areas of need. In Figure 8.6 is an example of a student survey that compliments the Midterm Evaluation filled out by Oakwood fourth-grade teachers. Students have an opportunity to review their initial responses, noting changes as they occur, periodically throughout the year.

Assessment and Evaluation Must Allow for Input from the Parent

When parents and teachers have met early in the year to communicate with each other the goals they want for the children, a two-way conversation has begun to occur. Let's say a parent wants as a goal for her child to see an improvement in his ability to read and understand information in the content areas. The teacher, child, and parent all become involved in a three-way conversation about this goal. Parents are sometimes asked to fill out a survey in which they record their perceptions as to their child's interests, strengths, and needs. This form may also include goals. Sometimes parents fill out these surveys with assistance from the child (see Figure 8.7).

It is important that evaluation forms sent home by the teacher include a place for parents to comment on what they see happening with regard to goals set for their child. Strategies used to improve specific skills may also be part of the conversation. Sometimes parents have ideas that translate into very successful performance on the part of the student. Providing parents with ample opportunities to share their ideas promotes partnership and a clearer understanding of the evaluation process.

Many teachers have a "homework folder" or "take-home folder" that children use to carry work samples and notes to and from home on a daily or weekly basis. Fran Schaller, a teacher in Springfield, Illinois, invites children to decorate a folder which is then laminated to increase durability. On the left inside cover of the folder, Fran staples several blank sheets of paper labeled "Parent/Teacher Notes." In a letter of introduction, she explains that parents may write notes to her in this space—and that she will write notes to them. Children take the folder home each day. At the beginning of the school year, Fran finds herself answering many questions from parents. This sets the stage for two-way communication throughout the year.

THINKING ABOUT MYSELF AS A LEARNER

NAME: ______________________ DATE: __________
GRADE: ______________________

Yes/No Comments/Examples

1. I try to be an effective communicator by:
______ using the writing process
______ following appropriate writing conventions
______ asking questions when I don't understand
______ participating in discussions
______ following directions
______ understanding what I read
______ using good study skills and habits
______ speaking clearly and distinctly

2. I try to be a self-directed learner by:
______ accepting challenges
______ using worktime productively
______ showing self-control
______ planning, organizing and completing tasks
______ showing interest and curiosity
______ making responsible choices
______ considering a variety of options when solving a problem
______ evaluating my own progress

3. I try to be a collaborative worker by:
______ cooperating with others
______ contributing to group work
______ appreciating differences
______ respecting rights, opinions and properties of others

Figure 8.6 *(Continued on next page)*

Yes/No Comments/Examples

4. I try to contribute to the community:
______ being knowledgeable about the earth
______ learning more about the earth and its people
______ taking care of the environment

5. I try to be a quality producer by:
______ using technology effectively
______ doing high-quality work
______ maintaining pride in my achievements

6. I try to be a complex thinker by:
______ having a positive attitude toward problem-solving
______ forming reasonable predictions
______ correctly applying mathematical procedures
______ using one or more methods to verify results

Figure 8.6 *(continued)*

Barb Brinkman, a special education teacher, gives each student a spiral notebook that serves as a dialogue journal between home and school. The journal goes home one or more times a week, depending on need, with comments and/or questions from Barb. Parents are encouraged to add their comments and questions, carrying on a written conversation or dialogue with their child's teacher. Barb lets parents know that the journal is one option for communication. Some parents find this a very effective tool and write rather lengthy notes several times a week. Other parents report finding Barb's notes helpful, but they prefer to respond through telephone calls or face-to-face visits.

Some teachers ask parents to help in the design of an evaluation instrument for rating home assignments. The brief form would be attached to each homework assignment returned to school and would indicate the difficulty level, the child's understanding of the task, and comments and/or suggestions from the parent. These instruments provide helpful information to the teacher and also give the parent an opportunity to be involved in the assessment process. Other teachers ask parents to record their own observations about their child's progress on an evaluation chart sent home. The example shown in Figure 8.8 is adapted from the Aledo Parent and School Initiative in Aledo, Illinois, School

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SURVEY OF CHILD'S INTEREST

Please help me get to know more about your child. What do you see as your child's greatest interests? Strengths? Areas of need? Please complete this questionnaire and return it to school as soon as possible. Thank you!

NAME: ______________________________

1. My child's general attitude toward school this year is ______________
   ____
2. My child appears to be very interested in ______________
   ____
3. I have noticed that my child is very good at ______________
   ____
4. I have noticed that my child has a difficult time ______________
   ____
5. My child's least favorite activities are ______________
   ____
6. My child's favorite school activities/subjects are ______________
   ____
7. My child's least favorite school activities/subjects are ______________
   ____
8. Something I'd like you to know about my child is ______________
   ____
9. Some positive characteristics or traits that my child has are ______________
   ____
10. Some comments or suggestions I have about my child's school experience are ______________

Figure 8.7

District Unit #201. The parent is asked to return the form to school the following year when the child is registered for kindergarten. In Figure 8.9 is an example of an observation form sent home to solicit parents' observations of their first-grade child's reading performance.

The conversation that is begun at the start of the school year can continue throughout the year as teachers offer parents the opportunity to be involved in the assessment process. Although not all parents will accept this responsibility or approach it with the same seriousness of purpose that some parents will, chances are great that the partnership will be strengthened as a result of the offer having been made. Parents who do take an active role in assessment

CHILD DEVELOPMENT OBSERVATION FORM: FOUR TO FIVE YEARS

You are invited to take an active role in assessing your child's development by charting some of the following skills as they are first learned or used frequently by your child. Please use the following range of skills as a guide, keeping in mind that children acquire new skills at varying ages.

During This Year Your Child May Learn to . . .

Date Skill First Attempted		Date Skill Frequently Used
____	Talk with speech that is ninety percent understandable	____
____	Bounce and catch a large ball with both hands	____
____	Talk in sentences of four to six words or more	____
____	Count one to ten objects	____
____	Tell his/her name	____
____	Follow a two-step direction	____
____	Name six to eight colors	____
____	Name three shapes: triangle, square, rectangle	____
____	Ask for help when needed	____
____	Understand meaning of behind, in front of, under, and over	____
____	Dress himself/herself	____
____	Attend to toileting needs independently	____
____	Answer who, what, why, where, and what if questioned	____
____	Scribble/draw	____
____	Understand opposites: big/little, long/short, hard/soft	____

Figure 8.8

MY CHILD AS A READER

Please indicate your observations of your child's reading during the past few weeks.

	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comments
1. My child enjoys listening to me read to him/her.				
2. My child enjoys reading to others.				
3. When my child reads, he/she knows most of the words.				
4. When my child reads, he/she notices when something he/she says doesn't make sense.				
5. When my child reads, he/she can figure out new words.				
6. When my child reads, he/she sometimes guesses at words, but they usually make sense.				
7. After my child reads, he/she can retell the story in his/her own words.				

Figure 8.9

of their child's progress will, undoubtably, have a greater understanding of the information shared through the reporting process.

Assessment and Evaluation Must Address the Outcomes We Have for Children

In recent years there has been much confusion over use of the term *outcomes*. Many concerns have come from parents over what they fear will result in a weakening of curriculum and, consequently, the school's failure to adequately educate their children.

If our instructional goals and, in turn, our assessment and evaluation procedures reflect the importance of a process-oriented education, parents will more readily understand and support our endeavors. They need to understand that it is not the number of problems that the child gets correct that is important in math but instead whether the child can take that concept and use it to solve problems he or she encounters in, as well as outside of, school. Similarly, a one hundred percent score on a spelling test is not the goal—spelling the words correctly when engaging in authentic writing tasks is!

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Teachers at Oakwood are beginning to work with parents to share expectations, goals, and outcomes we consider important for all children to achieve. Parents are an active part of this process: Without their input, the curriculum, as well as the assessment and reporting process, would suffer. Implementing this final guideline is not an easy task; it is one fraught with frustrations as parents and teachers often approach the issue from very different perspectives. We are, however, all benefiting from the process and from the dialogue that is emerging. Whatever the "outcome" may be, we are certain that there will be benefits in terms of increased parent involvement.

THE MANHATTAN ASSESSMENT PROJECT

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Three teachers at Amanda Arnold Elementary School in Manhattan, Kansas, initiated a project designed to integrate assessment and learning and to engage students and their parents in the process. Going a step further than had the teachers at Oakwood School, the teachers at Amanda Arnold garnered support for eliminating grades in the assessment and reporting process.

The Manhattan Assessment Project is based on beliefs and goals that are very similar to the guidelines developed at Oakwood School. These goals include: (1) build a strong home-school partnership by giving parents and children a role to play in the assessment process, (2) establish essential curricular outcomes for all students, (3) use a variety of assessment strategies and procedures, (4) work with parents and children to establish at least two individual goals for each child, and (5) empower parents, teachers, and students to replace traditional assessment and reporting practices with those that enhance achievement for all students (Bietau, Maughmer, and Crill 1993).

Rather than disseminating report cards, teachers confer with parents at the end of each term. No grades are used. In their place are teacher-developed checklists (also called *learning profiles*) and student portfolios. These tools are used in much the same way as they are at Oakwood School, except that conferences are held at the end of each nine-week term, rather than twice a year. The Manhattan Assessment Project was initiated by three teachers who felt that their assessment procedures were not aligned with their instructional practices, which reflected a process approach to learning. Through a mini-grant from the school district and assistance from the NEA/IBM School Renewal Network, these teachers spent a summer researching alternative assessment strategies, developing checklists, portfolio guidelines, and other strategies for use in the project. The result was the Manhattan Assessment Project, which was implemented the following year (Bietau, Maughmer, and Crill 1993). The project gained the support of colleagues, administrators, and parents and is now "a growing cadre of local teachers in pursuit of assessment alternatives" (24).

SUMMARY

Assessment and the reporting of pupil progress is a very challenging task. When schools attempt to involve parents in the process, they have found that parents come to understand more about the curriculum and their child's progress, have fewer questions, and are more supportive of both the teacher and the school. In this chapter we have shared five principles that have served to guide the development and implementation of assessment, evaluation, and reporting procedures at Oakwood School. Although Oakwood will, in all likelihood, continue to review and to reshape these procedures, the changes implemented during the past few years have yielded substantial results in terms of increased parental support and involvement in this area of their child's education.

The questions that follow relate to the guidelines we have shared in this chapter. Consideration of these questions may help you assess your beliefs about assessment and reporting of pupil progress.

For your consideration . . .

1. Evaluation must inform parents of the developmental level of the child.
   Yes/No
2. Assessment and evaluation must allow for input from the parent.
   Yes/No
3. When sending home assignments that have been evaluated and/or graded, the teacher should include a place for parents to comment.
   Yes/No

4. Parents should have a regular opportunity to comment on what they see happening with respect to goals set for their child.
   Yes/No
5. Schools must work to help parents realize that "outcomes" represent the goals we have for their children.
   Yes/No
6. Schools must help parents view education as a process through which students become effective communicators, self-directed learners, collaborative workers, community contributors, quality producers, and complex thinkers, rather than as a system for imparting a series of discrete skills and a set body of knowledge.
   Yes/No
7. Teachers must educate parents as to the types and purposes of the various assessment tools used.
   Yes/No
8. Students should have a role in the assessment and reporting process.
   Yes/No

REFERENCES

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Chapter 9

Planning and Implementing Effective Parent Conferences

A note from Kathy . . .
Although the majority of teachers enrolled in our graduate courses recognize the importance of regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, they report being extremely frustrated with the way most districtwide conference days are scheduled. When parents are scheduled in fifteen-minute blocks of time, one right after the other, teachers are hard-pressed to report the students' progress or give the parents any time to express their views and questions.

All too often parents and teachers leave a conference feeling frustrated at not having had the time they needed to really communicate with one another. In research by Lindle (1989), parents rated negatively almost everything about the parent-teacher conference, with resentment geared toward the formality of the conference and the limited time allotments. Ideally, conferences provide an opportunity to review goals and formulate plans and to facilitate a balanced look at all aspects of the child's development. Rather than a free-flowing exchange of questions and information, typical conferences often degenerate into a one-way reporting of pupil progress with hardly enough time left for parents to voice questions. And as discussed in earlier chapters, the parents of children who are experiencing difficulty in school often do not attend. Reasons for not attending were addressed in Chapter 2 as we discussed barriers to parent involvement. While we will not repeat that discussion here, it is understandable that parents who experienced difficulty during their own schooling would feel reluctant to attend a conference only to hear how their child is experiencing the same frustrations and difficulties. On the other hand, parents of children who are very successful in school often report feeling that conferences are a waste of time: "Why bother to attend if the teacher is just going to say 'Your child is doing fine?'"

Regularly scheduled conferences with sufficient time allotted for each afford teachers and parents needed opportunities to get to know one another and to plan strategies for working toward shared goals and outcomes. In this chapter we will approach parent-teacher conferencing from the standpoint of what they *could* be: an excellent opportunity for teacher, parent, and even child to have uninterrupted time and privacy for productive conversation about the child's learning. Just how schools will go about finding ways to implement the strategies we suggest will depend, in large part, on each school's commitment to forging a strong partnership with *each* child's family.

Planning for Parent-Teacher Conferences

Without the support of district level administrators and the school board, school personnel are limited in their abilities to plan and implement the kinds of parent-teacher conferences that are truly needed. Efforts must be made to help district leaders understand the problems associated with typical parent-teacher conferences and the gains to be realized from improving current conferencing routines and procedures. One way to garner support is to conduct a "satisfaction survey" with parents and teachers. Ask what they like about current conferencing procedures, what they would like to see changed, why they feel these changes are important, and the impact they believe the changes would have on student achievement and motivation. Gathering specific recommendations about the number of conferences to be scheduled each year and length of time for each also needs to take place. This will require decisions about alternatives for scheduling conferences. Many districts release children from school for a couple of days each year so that parent-teacher conferences can be scheduled districtwide. Other districts have "conference months" twice a year during which time they try to get all parents into the school for a conference. Substitute teachers are hired to "float" from one classroom to another when conferences are planned. Flexible conference times are scheduled, with the goal being one hundred percent attendance by parents at some time during the designated months.

Three teachers in the Amanda Arnold School in Manhattan, Kansas, initiated "The Manhattan Assessment Project" (Bietau, Maughmer, and Crill 1993) which utilized parent conferences, rather than report cards, for sharing progress. As discussed in the previous chapter on assessment and reporting of pupil progress, at least two individual goals for each child were established in a conference attended by parents, teacher, and child. Since no grades were used in the reporting of pupil progress, conferences were scheduled four times during the year, at the end of each nine-week term. Support for this change came from the school district, which funded a $750 mini-grant proposal submitted by Lisa Bietau, Barbara Maughmer, and Joyce Crill, the three teachers who developed the program. On a previously conducted survey, the parents had already indicated a lack of strong feelings about grades. Support for the project was gained from parents during an orientation meeting where the rationale for the project was explained, as were the new procedures to be followed.

Another way to solicit support from district leaders is to conduct a "cost analysis" of costs associated with the current conferencing procedures and additional costs that would be associated with recommended changes. These changes might include in-service education on communication and conferencing skills, additional release time for teachers to conduct conferences, and/or transportation and childcare for parents attending conferences.

Once support has been secured, a district or school level committee, or the faculty and staff from each school, needs to develop an action plan for parent-teacher conferencing. Decisions concerning the scheduling of dates and times for conferences, advertising of conferences, provision of transportation, childcare, translators, and in-service training must be made.

To boost attendance and to take advantage of the large numbers of parents who do come into the school building for conferences, special activities and displays can be planned. Having coffee and juice available and someone on hand to greet parents as they arrive is a good idea. Very large schools sometimes enlist high school students to serve as "tour guides" to facilitate parents' movement around the building or to work as childcare assistants. Other schools host a book fair, often staffed by parent volunteers or older students, which takes place during the conferences. Book browsing gives parents and children something to do before and after their conference. Hallway displays of children's work also provide something of interest for parents who arrive early for their appointment. Finally, booths offering information from community service agencies, the parent-teacher organization, the school volunteer program, and so forth might be set up to reach parents coming into the school for conferences. Many schools let parents know that report cards will be distributed during the conferences. This serves as an incentive for some parents to attend. In addition to distributing report cards, Indianapolis schools involved in the Parents in Touch program use conferences as an opportunity for teachers to distribute materials developed by the Parents in Touch program staff to help parents understand and support their children and the schools. Activity calendars, student/teacher/parent contracts, and folders containing school policies and procedures are given to all parents at the first parent-teacher conference (Warner 1991).

Involvement of all school personnel during planning and implementation of conferences is important. Paraprofessionals, librarians, instructional leaders, home-school liaisons, visiting teachers, reading and math specialists, guidance counselors, secretaries, and other personnel can all play a role in making parent-teacher conferences successful. These individuals can assist in scheduling and publicizing conferences, in preparing special hall displays or bulletin boards, in arranging for book fairs and other events to be coordinated with the conference day(s) and in arranging transportation and carpools for parents. On conference day they can serve as greeters and guides when parents enter the building, provide childcare, staff booths and other exhibits, and collect and tally parent conference evaluation forms. Teachers who are able to may serve as translators for non-English-speaking parents. Older students, parents, and community volunteers may also serve in this capacity.

Scheduling of conferences is a huge task, but making it as convenient as possible for parents to attend serves to improve attendance *and* foster good relationships. At the beginning of the school year, some schools ask parents to indicate preferred times for conferencing. These times are taken into consideration as conferences are set up. Flexible scheduling with both early morning and evening hours available for working parents is a must. Attention need also be given to the teachers who have children attending school in the system. As parents, they too need the opportunity to attend conferences with their children's teachers. Schools can also assist when parents have more than one child enrolled in the school. Teachers work with one another to schedule the conferences close together so that parents have to make only one trip. As in the case of Oakwood School, this coordination is facilitated by the principal. Once tentative schedules are developed, a short teachers' meeting is held to allow for negotiating conference times for families with more than one child enrolled. A letter of invitation is sent home with the schedule of suggested times, and parents have an opportunity to respond and, if necessary, reschedule their appointment(s). At this point the conference schedules are given to the school secretary, making rescheduling easier for both parents and teachers.

When the letter of invitation goes home, some schools or individual teachers also send home tips for successful conferencing and suggested questions parents might want to ask the teacher. An example is shown in Figure 9.1. This information and a conference evaluation form for parents to fill out after each conference, needs to be prepared during the planning stage. Figure 9.2 is an example of a conference evaluation form.

Many teachers have children write a letter to tell their parents about an upcoming conference. Reminders about upcoming conferences can be placed in classroom and school newsletters and in the local newspapers. Schools might also consider sending letters to the businesses or industries employing a large number of parents of children enrolled in the school. Soliciting employer support can be advantageous, particularly if employees are willing to give parents release time to attend the conferences. The Chamber of Commerce sends out these letters in some cities, asking employers to release parents from work to attend conferences. Some schools put public service announcements about the conferences on the television and radio. In addition, students sometimes visit the radio station on a school field trip and tape messages that are broadcast the week of the conferences. These messages are usually written by the students and directed at parents. Messages include the name of the school and the dates of the upcoming parent conferences. Parents and community mem-

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Conferences give parents and teachers a chance to work together to build the teamwork that helps children learn better. The five tips discussed below can help you, the parent, get the most out of each conference.

1. Think about what you want to discuss in the conference. You may wish to identify some issues and/or prepare some questions. For example:
   - How is my child doing in class?
   - Does my child use time well? Have good work habits?
   - Does my child turn assignments in on time?
   - Does my child get along with others?
   - What can I do at home to support what you are doing at school?
2. Talk with your child before the conference. Ask what your child thinks the teacher will say. Ask if your child has any concerns or problem areas in school. Talk about what your child likes most and least about school—and why.
3. Ask the teacher to explain anything you don't understand. If there are any terms or programs you do not know about ask. Sometimes programs are referred to by their initials. For example, TAG refers to the Talented and Gifted program.
4. Be prepared to talk and to listen. Tell the teacher what you observe at home. Talk about your child's interests, likes, and dislikes. Share any concerns your child has about school. Be sure to let the teacher know about anything that may affect your child's learning.
5. Follow-up. Work with the teacher to develop a plan for follow-up. If you think of a question you didn't ask, write a note or call.

Figure 9.1

bers tend to notice when children's voices are heard making a radio announcement, and the more children know about and are involved in the planning for parent-teacher conferences, the better the attendance.

Some attention to expectations for each conference may also be a part of this initial planning process. Teachers may be expected to (1) develop a plan, or work with each child to develop a plan, for each conference; (2) prepare a folder of each child's work, and/or (3) ask parents to fill out an evaluation form at the close of the conference. Teachers may also devise their own personal reminder letters for the upcoming conference, including purposes and objectives for the conference and some means for gathering parent input and suggestions into the conference planning process. Asking parents to send back

Parent Evaluation of Parent-Teacher Conference

Please help us evaluate the effectiveness of our parent-teacher conferences by filling out this form and leaving it in the box provided. Thank you!

CIRCLE ONE

1. I feel the conference helped me better understand my child's abilities and needs. Yes No
Comment:

2. I understand more about the instructional program. Yes No
Comment:

3. I understand how my child's progress is determined. Yes No
Comment:

4. I have some ideas I can use at home to help my child learn. Yes No
Comment:

5. I was able to express my concerns and ask my questions. Yes No
Comment:

6. I understood the teacher's explanations. Yes No
Comment:

7. I have other concerns about my child's education that were not addressed. Yes No
Comment:

8. I worked with the teacher to plan strategies for helping my child learn. Yes No
Comment:

9. I felt welcomed by the teacher. Yes No
Comment:

10. Overall, I am pleased with the conference. Yes No
Comment:

Figure 9.2

a form listing one or two issues, ideas, or questions they would like to discuss during the conference would provide the teacher with a little "lead time" for preparing to meet these individual needs and would convey to parents the desire to make this conference meaningful to them. In addition, having this information from the parents would assist the teacher in developing conference plans. A written plan with one or two objectives should be developed for each conference. Having such a plan helps focus a conference and ensures that the most critical issues will receive adequate attention. Figure 9.3 is an example of one conference plan. The form includes a place for recording the name of the child and of the parents, since last names are sometimes different. Also included is space for recording conference objectives and for writing some strengths and needs to be discussed during the conference. There is also space for writing down a few ideas or strategies to suggest for both the home and school setting.

Final planning for conferences includes setting up an area in the classroom where teacher and parents can comfortably talk. Adult-sized chairs are more appropriate than children's chairs or desks. Placement of the chairs is an important consideration. The teacher should refrain from sitting behind a desk, which conveys a formal "expert/novice" relationship rather than one in which parents and teacher come together as partners or as a team with the child. A small table for displaying the child's portfolio or folder of work is also needed.

A note from Elizabeth . . .

Communicating clearly and effectively with parents is a tremendous responsibility—and one that Oakwood teachers take very seriously. It is also a time-consuming task, as planning at both the school and classroom level is often extensive. Whenever possible, Oakwood teachers are given release time to work on conference plans without the children in attendance. We are sometimes able to accomplish this by scheduling conferences to coincide with grading periods. Teachers appreciate the planning time, and the conferences are more successful because of the planning that has taken place.

During the Conference: Communicating Effectively with Parents

Most teachers have not had formal training in conducting parent-teacher conferences. Staff development opportunities designed to help teachers gain needed communication and conferencing skills can also result in an increase in teachers' self-confidence in working with parents. In addition to routines for conducting conferences, teachers need to develop active listening skills, strategies for facilitating problem solving and negotiation, and strategies for dealing with the angry—and possibly verbally abusive—parent. Teachers also need to be prepared to conduct conferences in which the child will attend with the

CONFERENCE PLANNING SHEET

CHILD'S NAME: ______________________________ DATE: ______________

PARENTS' NAMES: ____

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES: (1) ______________________________________

____

(2) ____

____.

STRENGTHS OBSERVED DURING THIS PERIOD ____________________

____

____

____.

NEEDS OBSERVED DURING THIS PERIOD ________________________

____

____

____.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES TO TRY AT SCHOOL ____________________

____

____

____.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES TO TRY AT HOME ______________________

____

____

Figure 9.3

parents. These parent-teacher-child conferences will be discussed in a separate section in this chapter.

Routines for conducting parent-teacher conferences. Conferences should begin on a positive note, with teachers greeting parents in a relaxed, friendly manner. Most teachers find that sharing a positive comment about the child and then asking the parent to share something positive they've noticed about the child is a good way to start the conference. Before addressing the conference objectives, which would include relating information about the child's progress, the teacher should pause to ask the parents if they have something they would like to share and discuss first. If the parents have already given the teacher this information in advance of the conference, the teacher might point out how the stated conference objectives reflect the concerns and questions identified by the parents.

As pointed out in earlier chapters, teachers must use language appropriate for the parents, being careful to avoid use of technical terms and specialized vocabulary. Rather than assuming that parents know common acronyms used for various programs and tests, the teacher should simply explain that, for example, TAG stands for the Talented and Gifted program.

In reporting the child's progress, the teacher should share anecdotal information and concrete examples, relating the child's growth in light of the curricular goals, objectives, and expectations. In conferences where the child is not present, the child should have been involved in gathering together evidence of his or her progress. Examples may include lists of books read, written reports and stories, projects, and other assignments. Some teachers have children keep a scrapbook. One or two "best" examples are included on a weekly or biweekly basis, along with an explanation as to the growth the piece reflects and why it was included. Sometimes there are audio or video tapes of a child conducting a special classroom presentation or engaging in oral reading. While time does not allow for an extensive "showing" of the child's work over a six- or nine-week period, a sufficient number of items should be available to reveal a thorough look at the child's progress in all areas of the curriculum.

Parents should be given ample time to share their observations of the child's progress and to suggest their ideas for continued growth at school as well as at home. If the conversation goes too far astray, the teacher can tactfully refer again to the conference objectives. Strategies for follow-up of objectives and conference outgrowth should be jointly planned by teacher and parents; however, the teacher will need to initiate the discussion. Writing down the ideas suggested and eventually agreed upon is helpful as it not only keeps you "on task" but also serves as a reminder of what was said. Figure 9.4 is an example of a conference outgrowth form that could be used. At the end of the conference the teacher either gives parents a copy of the conference outgrowth plan or assures them that one will be mailed as soon as possible. Some teachers also give parents a set of home-learning materials or activities they can use to help their child at home. Finally, parents are asked to fill out an evaluation form designed to improve the overall conferencing strategy. If another parent is scheduled directly after the departure of one parent, the teacher could facilitate that parent's departure by putting away all conference notes in a folder and walking the parent to the classroom door. Material for the next conference should be in a closed folder to ensure that it cannot be seen by another parent but is still readily available.

After each conference teachers should follow up by continuing to communicate with the parents. The conference outgrowth form has a place for recording strategies and dates for follow-up. Some parents and teachers set a

CONFERENCE OUTGROWTH SHEET

NAME: ____________________ DATE: __________

STUDENT'S STRENGTHS: ____________________

STUDENT'S NEEDS: ____________________

STRATEGIES TO BE USED AT SCHOOL: ____________________

STRATEGIES TO BE USED AT HOME: ____________________

FOLLOW-UP PLAN/PROCEDURES/DATES: ____________________

Parent

Teacher

Figure 9.4

follow-up conference time. Others agree to make contact by telephone or to send written messages to share progress made. Oftentimes parents request information, or teachers offer to share information that is not readily available during the conference. These follow-up materials may be sent after the conference. Some teachers send individual letters thanking parents for attending the conference; others include a thank-you note in the next classroom newsletter. All of these follow-up strategies serve as concrete reminders to parents about the strategies agreed on at the conference and increase the chances that parents will do their part at home.

Active listening skills. The quality of conferences depends largely upon the communication skills of both teachers and parents. Recognizing the potential impact of interpersonal and communication skills, some schools offer separate communication skills workshops for teachers and for parents. Parents who are recognized as good communicators may conduct or assist in conducting the parent workshop. Whether for parents or teachers, communication skills workshops should include strategies for active listening.

Active listening is employed by a teacher when a parent indicates that he or she has a problem or an unmet need. Using active-listening strategies conveys an attempt on the part of the teacher to listen to and understand what is being said. Body posture is important. Adopting an "open" body position—with arms resting comfortably downward—and leaning slightly toward the speaker conveys a willingness to listen and to enter into a two-way exchange of information and ideas. In contrast, a listener who is leaning back with arms crossed over the chest is often seen as "closed"—disinterested, defensive, or even hostile toward the speaker. Maintaining direct eye contact, if appropriate to the speaker's culture, is recommended, as is responding with a nod or other facial movement that acknowledges listening.

Being aware of a parent's relaxed, open posture or of body tension, hesitation, or excitability can help the teacher better understand the message being conveyed. If a parent appears hesitant to share, the teacher might ask a leading question such as "Tell me what you see as your child's greatest strengths or interests." Getting the parent to talk about her child is a way to help her feel more relaxed and comfortable in discussing her concerns.

In addition to being a good observer, it is important to be a good listener. Rather than interrupting the speaker to share one's own views, the active listener *listens*. So often we only "listen with half an ear." Instead of really attempting to put ourselves in the place of the speaker, we spend most of the time the speaker is talking thinking of how we want to respond. As soon as the speaker pauses to collect his or her thoughts, we jump in with what we want to say. An active listener not only attends to the speaker's *words* but also notices the *way* the speaker shares the message. A respect for silence is helpful. If the speaker pauses, it may be because of an uncertainty as to how to put into words what he or she wants to say. If the listener senses this, a nod or a simple comment such as "Go on" or "I'd like to hear more" may encourage the speaker to continue. If the speaker is digressing too far from the main issue, the listener may redirect the speaker by saying "I was interested in the comment you made earlier about . . . Could you tell me more about that?" This conveys an openness to continuing the conversation, while at the same time helping the speaker get back on target. This strategy may also be used if the speaker is beginning to reveal too much. A parent who uses a conference situation to discuss personal problems may later regret having said too much and may withdraw from future contact with the teacher. While it is helpful for the teacher to know about changes in the home environment and problems that may interfere with the child's learning, the focus of the discussion should remain centered on the child and on strategies that may be used at the time. The teacher may, however, offer to refer the parent to other sources for help with the problem. Admitting that one is not equipped to handle a problem is not rude; offering to help locate someone who can is an acceptable way of conveying concern.

Briefly restating the main ideas conveyed by the speaker is a good active listening strategy. Since it is impossible to *really know* what another person is thinking and feeling, active listening responses should be offered in a tentative manner. That is, the listener shares the perceptions gained from the speaker in a way that invites confirmation. If the listener is relatively certain that he or she has understood the speaker, opening with phrases such as "So, from your point of view, . . ." or "What I hear you saying is, . . ." and "It seems to you . . ." lets the speaker know he or she was listened to and that the listener cares enough to check to see if he or she understood correctly.

In cases where the speaker has clearly and specifically stated the situation and/or the problem, restating the main points may be redundant and unnecessary. Silence or acknowledgement would be more appropriate, perhaps followed by a request for suggestions for solving the problem.

If the listener has experienced difficulty understanding the speaker's message, he or she might offer a tentative summary of the main points, beginning with phrases such as "Please correct me if I'm wrong, but as I understand you, . . ." or "Let me see if I understand you . . . ." and "This is what I think I hear you saying: . . ." If this is not possible due to a complete or almost complete lack of understanding on the part of the listener, a simple request for clarification is more in order.

Active listening is a skill that teachers need to develop to communicate more effectively with individuals who indicate the presence of a problem or unmet need. While active listening cannot ensure a successful conference, use of active listening facilitates conversation. Teachers who seek parents' opinions and ideas first find that a parent is more willing to work with the teacher on plans designed to have a positive impact on the child.

Facilitating problem-solving and negotiation. Teachers who have a genuine desire to participate in a partnership with the family will approach conferences with an attitude of sharing and learning, as well as with a willingness to consider parents' perspectives. Starting off the conference on a positive note and giving parents the opportunity to first share their concerns (before addressing issues the teacher needs to discuss) demonstrate respect for the parents and the role they have in their children's education. When a team approach is used in problem-solving conferences, teachers are more likely to avoid many of the pitfalls that plague some teacher-parent interactions. It is a good idea to be cognizant of these pitfalls and the ways they manifest themselves within the conference situation.

As stated in earlier chapters, the teacher must avoid the role of the "expert." Use of technical terminology and labels to describe the program and the child's performance only serves to put the parent on the defensive. In a team approach there are no experts and novices—only partners. When describing a child's behavior or performance, the teacher should do precisely that—*describe.* Use of negative labels and terms, such as *behind, immature,* and *hyperactive*, are unsuitable in a parent-teacher exchange. Similarly, speaking in "absolutes" is rarely a good practice. For example, "Stan rarely chooses to read during free-choice time" is better than "Stan doesn't like to read."

Another pitfall to avoid involves engaging in unprofessional conversation. Although usually meant to make the parent feel as if the teacher really understands a problem or situation, sharing personal information about oneself or about other children and/or parents is unprofessional and may even represent a breach of confidence. Parents do not need to know that the teacher was also divorced or suffered from a previous illness. And divulging information about other families, however insignificant it may seem, is strictly unacceptable. A teacher may say, for instance, "Many parents find that preadolescents are quite a handful!" but should *not* say "Well, you are not alone. You know, the Smiths have been having quite a time with Shelly this year."

Sometimes the teacher ends up, quite by accident, in the middle of a family squabble. For example, a parent may say to the teacher: "My husband says 'spare the rod and spoil the child.' What do you think about spanking children?" The teacher has to be very diplomatic in answering this question. A response that recognizes the existence of a broad range of guidance and discipline techniques and includes an offer to share some of the strategies used in the classroom is less likely to result in the teacher's getting "caught in the middle" than a direct yes or no answer would be.

Finally, in a team approach, the teacher does not assume ownership of problems and all responsibility for solving problems but rather shares in problem-solving situations with parents—and child, whenever appropriate. Assuming ownership of a problem conveys a variety of messages, most of which are negative. To start with, taking all of the responsibility for solving a problem suggests that the parents lack the ability to contribute in a meaningful way. It also reinforces the stereotypical picture of the teacher as expert. Also, whether the teacher has initiated the problem-solving conference or whether one or both of the parents have asked for assistance, ownership of the problem also means ownership of the solution. That is, if the solution fails to yield the desired results, the teacher will most likely be blamed.

Sometimes parents ask for advice. When this happens, it's usually a good idea to keep in mind that people who ask for advice have probably already gotten a great deal of it from relatives, friends, and neighbors. They may be seeking confirmation of a decision they have already made, in which case conflicting advice from the teacher will not necessarily be welcomed. They may be confused, and rather than actually wanting the advice they ask for, they may actually be seeking additional information and alternatives from which to make their own decisions. It is probably human nature for us to want to offer advice and help others solve problems; however, offering several speculative suggestions and letting parents choose their own solution is much preferred. When teacher and parents are working together to solve a problem that involves the child, they all should contribute to the discussion. Whenever possible, the teacher should refrain from sharing an idea that the parents may be able to offer on their own. Having parents' ideas become part of the solution is highly desirable and helps promote ownership of both problem and solution.

Strategies for dealing with angry and/or verbally abusive parents. Regardless of how teachers may try to maintain a pleasant team approach with all parents, most teachers at one time or another have an unpleasant encounter with a parent. Being the receiver of an angry outburst is a frustrating experience, particularly when the outburst gives rise to feelings that range from fear or helplessness to anger (Lawrence and Hunter 1978). When a teacher feels he or she may be abused by a parent who has scheduled a conference, that teacher would probably be wise to ask the principal or another school staff member to sit in on the conference. If this is not determined to be the best course of action, the teacher may meet with the parent in an area that allows for privacy but is not secluded from other school personnel. If an angry parent drops in for a conference—unannounced—the teacher may quickly need to excuse himself or herself to let the office know that a "visitor" is in the building. The principal or other staff member could then wait in the hall near the teacher's room for the duration of the conference.

Although there are a small percentage of teachers who face physical danger from an angry, abusive parent, most teachers do not. Unfortunately, there are many teachers who are approached by angry parents who become verbally abusive. Whether an explosive situation can be defused depends largely on the teacher's reaction. Following are several techniques for dealing with angry, verbally abusive parents. Teachers who are able to use effective techniques for responding to a parent's anger find that they have a sense of professional strength that helps them through these difficult situations (Lawrence and Hunter 1978).

1. *Try to remain as calm and unemotional as possible.* While it is only human nature to feel anger when confronted with an angry, verbal tirade, we need to make every effort not to show our emotions. Mentally counting to ten while looking directly at the parent and maintaining an expressionless face will make us appear calmer than we actually feel. Since behavior is contagious, some parents will stop short when no response is made to their outburst.
2. *Acknowledge the parent's anger.* Responding to a parent's outburst by issuing a calm acknowledgement of his or her anger often results in an end to the tirade. Saying "My goodness! I can certainly tell that you are very angry" or "I see that you are angry. Let's sit down and talk" lets the parent know that he or she has your attention and that

you are willing to converse. If it is clear that the parent is angry because of an error made by the teacher or the school, it is generally best for the teacher to acknowledge the error and apologize, then offer to talk about plans for either remedying the situation or making amends. If the parent is angry because of a policy situation that would require political action to bring about change, the teacher may suggest that the parent issue a complaint with the building principal, the district superintendent, or the school board.

3. *Make a list of the parent's complaints.* When the teacher is listening carefully enough to record each complaint, sometimes the parent slows down and makes an effort to convey main points in a clearer, more appropriate manner. The teacher should convey an earnest attempt to write down every complaint and should ask parents to clarify complaints that are too general before engaging in problem-solving activities. If the parent stops, the teacher can request that he or she look over the list to check for completeness and accuracy. Then, the parent can be asked to share suggestions or solutions for remedying the situation. The teacher would again write down any suggestions offered by the parent. Writing down complaints and possible solutions helps to clarify the problem and leads to more effective problem solving. It also helps prevent later misunderstandings about what was said.
4. *Tell the parent how his or her angry words are making you feel.* If unsuccessful in attempts to employ the first three techniques, the teacher may then try to interrupt the parent's flow of anger. For example, while still trying to portray a calm and unemotional demeanor, the teacher may say "Your raising your voice does not help me understand the situation" or "I am extremely uncomfortable with the tone of voice you are using."
5. *Stop the conference.* When the teacher has tried, unsuccessfully, to defuse the situation by remaining calm, acknowledging the parents anger, and stating discomfort with the parent's behavior, it is time to call an end to the conference. No one benefits from an extended angry outburst: not the teacher, not the child, not even the parent. To accept abuse will not remedy the situation, and it is emotionally draining on the teacher! The teacher should make a simple statement like "It's not going to be helpful for us to continue this conference today. We can make another appointment to meet when we are both calm." Chances are, if the parent is really angry, the teacher may have to repeat the statement and then physically remove himself or herself from the room. Walking toward the office while calmly repeating the statement for a third time usually manages to achieve the desired result. The parent may leave angry, but the teacher

is relieved, at least temporarily, of the situation. Also, while efforts to defuse the situation failed, the teacher did not do anything to impact negatively on future communications.

Use of one or more of these techniques for dealing with angry, verbally abusive parents is a way for teachers to maintain professionalism, while at the same time refusing to be the target of a parent's anger. While the situation will be no less unpleasant, most teachers will feel some sense of satisfaction knowing that they were able to employ a sound strategy for attempting to resolve the situation.

Unscheduled Conferences

While the majority of conferences are scheduled, principals and teachers do complain about parents who drop in unannounced to chat with the teacher. Except for the occasional thirty-second encounter in the hallway to exchange small bits of information, conferences should be scheduled. Certainly teachers should not be expected to conduct a conference without planning nor should administrators have to find someone to cover the teacher's class. An "appointment-only" policy for conferences benefits everyone, and parents should be well-informed of the policy and of the reasons why schools must adhere to it. In an effort to be accommodating to parents who failed to schedule a conference and who feel they have a pressing issue to discuss, schools sometimes create problems by going ahead with the conference. In such a case, the teacher is not adequately prepared and in all likelihood cannot give the parent the attention he or she deserves. In addition, the teacher does not have the time to raise issues he or she knows need to be addressed. Spur-of-the-moment conferences only serve to shortchange the parent, the teacher, and, most of all, the student.

While parents should know of and adhere to the appointment-only policy for conferences, school personnel should know how to respond graciously to the parent who does drop in unannounced. Everyone coming into the school, unexpected or not, should receive a warm smile and a pleasant greeting. For the parent who inquires about chatting with a particular teacher, the response might be routine, but sincere: "Oh, I'm sure . . . would want to meet with you, but all conferences are by appointment only. We want to ensure that each conference is well-planned and conducted in privacy to ensure a satisfying outcome for both teacher and parent. I'll be happy to have . . . contact you as soon as possible to set up a time that is convenient for both of you." Parents who persist should receive the same pleasant but firm message. Consistency in dealing with parents who drop in unexpectedly will result in fewer requests for unscheduled conferences.

Parent-Teacher-Child Conferences

Although most schools still exclude the student from the parent-teacher conference, students increasingly are being invited to take an active part in conferences for which the goal is to share progress, discuss particular strengths and needs, and form plans for continued growth. Children need to contribute to their parents' understanding of the child's progress, and structured involvement of the child in the conference can be an excellent vehicle for doing so. Inclusion of children in the parent-teacher conference is not really a new idea; educators have for years advocated letting children play an active role in evaluating and setting goals for learning (Readdick, Golbeck, Klein, and Cartwright 1984; Tanner 1978; Mathias 1967). Teachers have reported that young children are more likely to develop increasing skill in self-evaluation and decision making when permitted an early and continued role in conferences (Readdick et al. 1984). Furthermore, Mathias (1967) indicated that both parents and teachers were more likely to have positive discussions when children were present. Readdick et al. (1984) devised a four-step conference sequence for parent-teacher-child conferences. In Step 1, the teacher elicits assessment of the child's progress from the child and the parents. The teacher joins in the assessment and an effort is made to "construct a total picture of the child as a growing and learning person" (154). Setting goals and objectives based on the assessment is achieved in Step 2. Oftentimes, the teacher suggests several tentative goals and objectives and asks the child and parents to indicate their preferences. As the child and parents gain experience in this type of conference procedure, the teacher may look first to the child to formulate goals and objectives. In Step 3, learning activities are specified. The intent is for child and parents to participate with the teacher in generating a list of ideas for meeting goals and objectives. In early conferences the teacher may need to identify for the child and parents feasible alternatives, with the child and parents expressing their preferences. Once activities have been selected by the child, with input from the parents and teacher, Step 4, identification of evaluation procedures, commences. Again, in early conferences the teacher may need to identify how the child's progress will be evaluated by each (child, parent, teacher). As the child and parents gain skill and comfort in the conferencing process, the teacher may share available evaluation techniques with the child and parent, selecting from among alternatives presented by the teacher. If feasible, the teacher would, in Step 4, first ask the child how his or her learning should be evaluated.

Children's portfolios play a major role in parent-teacher conferences at Oakwood School in Hannibal, Missouri, and at Amanda Arnold Elementary in Manhattan, Kansas. In fact, letting children know they are going to share their portfolios at periodic conferences with both teacher and parents present often produces a year-long increase in effort and accountability.

Preparation for parent-teacher-child conferences is much the same as for traditional conferences. The teachers gather observation notes and checklists (also called *learning profiles*). In schools where grades are required, they would be available and would provide the teacher an opportunity to communicate the disadvantages of reporting progress through grades, as well as the information that went into the determination of each grade. A copy of the goals that were set at the beginning of the year by the parent and child are also available. When the student is to be involved in the conference, that student is also involved in the planning. Many teachers ask the child to review what is in his portfolio and plan a presentation for his parents. In preparation for the conference presentation, the student may share his "presentation" with a peer or be videotaped sharing his presentation. This gives the student an opportunity to view himself as a presenter and to critique and make any changes prior to the conference. Children can also be given responsibility for gathering other items to be shared. These may include a list of all books they have read, and a list of written reports, including planning notes, rough drafts, and revising and editing notes. In addition, all children take an active part in setting up displays and projects that will be viewed by their parents. Finally, teachers generally ask each student to write a letter to preview for parents what they will find out at the conference.

After the teacher has greeted the parents and exchanged pleasantries, the child takes the lead in sharing what is in the portfolio. The teacher supports the very young child in making this presentation, but as the child gains experience, it is amazing how much insight can be gained by the parent and teacher when the child puts his or her ideas and rationales into words.

A note from Elizabeth . . .

Scott, a second-grader, had experienced some problems in the first grade. He was beginning to show growth as a reader and a writer, and his teacher made a monumental effort to schedule both parents for a conference. She and Scott had worked on what he would say to them at the conference. His teacher shared with me after the conference, "I don't think that Scott had ever been really listened to by his parents before. When he was finished, we all clapped! That conference may be one of the most important things that has ever happened to him as a learner."

When teacher and child collaborate on reporting what they know about the child's progress, the benefits far outweigh the information that is shared. The awareness of everyone involved—parent, teacher, and even child—improves. Sometimes the work shared by the child does not meet with expectations held by the parents and/or the teacher. The teacher can monitor the parents' reaction to the child's presentation and either defend or agree with their analysis.

It may be that little progress has been made toward the goals set early in the year by parents and child. Reviewing these goals *with the child present* is more beneficial than when parents and teacher review goals in the child's absence. Children need to take an active part in evaluating progress toward goals. They also need to be intricately involved in developing action plans that will impact on their future growth. Following each parent-teacher-child conference at Amanda Arnold Elementary School, a written narrative summarizing the agreements made in the conference is prepared. After each party reads this narrative, it is placed in the child's portfolio along with the child's current goal-setting sheet and learning profile.

Special Conferences

The progress of special needs children is reviewed on an annual basis before the writing of a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) occurs. This process should be viewed as a cooperative venture aimed at student growth—with parents and whenever appropriate, with children, as key players. Many parents are intimidated in IEP conferences, which typically involve a number of school personnel and specialists. Helping parents feel as comfortable as possible should be a major objective of conference planning by school personnel. Schools that let parents know their input and suggestions are expected and valued can generally anticipate smoother, more productive conferences. One way to share with parents the important role they have is to send home tips for preparing for the IEP meeting. Including information as to who will be present at the meeting and the role and responsibility of each individual helps parents prepare, particularly those who are new to the process. Suggestions for parents include jotting down notes about out-of-school observations of the child's progress, reviewing the previous year's IEP and school records, reviewing homework assignments attempted and/or completed by the child, observing the child in the classroom and in therapy sessions, and talking with the child about his or her perceptions and possible concerns.

Parents may also be encouraged to develop a list of questions to ask at the conference. Some suggested questions to be covered in every conference may be sent home in advance. These may include: "When will the related services begin and end?"; "How much time will my child be receiving at these services each week?"; "How much time or how many classes will my child have with nondisabled peers?"; "Is my child eligible to receive extended school year services?"; "How will my child receive services (in the classroom, resource room, through consultation, etc.)?"; and "What modifications will my child have in the regular classroom setting?" Parents may also be encouraged to ask questions that are not answered by the information on the IEP, such as: "How well does my child get along with others?"; "How is my child progressing?" "What is my child's classroom behavior like?"; "What types of rules or procedures is my child expected to follow?"; "What are the consequences when my child fails to follow stated rules or procedures?"; and "How can I support my child's learning at home?"

As with traditional parent-teacher conferences and parent-teacher-child conferences, conferences for parents of children with special needs (whether the children themselves attend) must be well-prepared, well-organized, and project a team approach. When all of the key players are prepared, the conference becomes more focused and objectives are more readily accomplished.

Alternatives for Nonattending Parents

Despite efforts to schedule a conference with each and every child's parents, some parents still may not acknowledge the school's invitation or request for a conference. Although lack of interest may be the reason, there are probably other circumstances that result in the lack of attendance. Barriers discussed in Chapter 2 become most evident when it comes to the scheduling of parent-teacher conferences. An important part of the evaluation process for schoolwide or districtwide conferences is to ascertain which parents did not attend and, if at all possible, to ascertain the reasons why.

A plan should already be in place for reaching nonattending parents or, if necessary, a parental substitute (grandparent, uncle, aunt, etc.). The plan might include alternative conferencing strategies such as home visits for parents who are only comfortable on "their own turf." Teams of teachers may consider holding conferences in local neighborhoods or housing projects if children are bused to the school from other areas of the city. Conferences might also be held in other neutral locations. Perhaps conferences could be held in the coffee room of a local job site, such as a factory or large business, where a number of parents are employed. Arrangements would, of course, be made in advance with employers. Other neutral locations include local community centers, churches, libraries, and even fast-food restaurants. One teacher brought in conference folders and let parents and children know that he would be at a local fast food restaurant from 6 to 9 p.m. one evening. The restaurant served free coffee to the parents and mini ice-cream cones to the children.

Sometimes parents who do not speak English need to know that a translator will be available during the conference. If a parent volunteer is serving as the translator, having that person make personal contact with the parent before the conference may make a difference. Having another individual, such as a fellow parent or a member of the local neighborhood clergy, agree to contact any nonattending parent on behalf of the school and perhaps offer to sit in during the conference, might also result in more parent conferences.

As an alternative for family members who simply cannot arrange their schedules to attend a conference at the school building, some teachers offer to send home a videotape of a student-teacher conference. This works especially well at the middle school level. The conference is taped, just as if the parent were in attendance. Before the conference, the student and teachers outline what the conference will cover—student participation in school activities, achievements, strengths, and areas of need. While the tape rolls, the students review samples of their work and discuss their individual progress with the teachers. When necessary, teachers do discuss learning difficulties or problem behaviors on the video. In these cases in particular, teachers make follow-up phone calls after the parents have had an opportunity to view the videotape.

Telephone Conferences

Another alternative to the face-to-face conference is the telephone conference. Though not nearly as effective for sharing student progress and working together to develop plans and strategies for future progress, the telephone conference is better than having no contact at all. Problems associated with telephone conferencing include finding a convenient time for the call and, when necessary, establishing a time limit for the call. In addition, since establishing a close rapport is hard to do without face-to-face contact, sharing information that is delicate is difficult, such as when a student is performing poorly or needs to be referred for special services.

Despite shortcomings associated with telephone conferencing, such calls can be made more effective if teachers follow a few simple guidelines. First of all, teachers need to prepare for the telephone call. Using the conference planning sheet described earlier in the chapter is a good idea. Also, having samples of the student's work available during the conversation is helpful when describing specific examples that are indicative of progress made, strengths, and/or needs. A conference outgrowth form should also be used during the telephone conference for recording shared views and expectations as well as for strategies for helping the child in his or her future progress. This form would be mailed to parents as a follow-up to the telephone conference.

If at all possible, the telephone conference should be scheduled. Calls that come during the dinner hour, or when parents are busy putting little ones to bed, are generally not appreciated. Also, calling a parents' workplace is considered inappropriate in most instances. A note may be sent home asking the parent to indicate a convenient time for the teacher to call. Attached to the note should be a brief description of what the teacher hopes to accomplish through the conference and suggested questions that the parent may want to ask the teacher. If the parent does not respond, the teacher may call to set up an appointment for the telephone conference. The teacher should be prepared to proceed with the conference if the parent is willing to do so.

When the parent answers the telephone, the teacher should identify himself or herself, using a tone of voice that conveys warmth and friendliness. It's usually a good idea to ask if this is still a good time to talk and to thank the parent for accepting your call. Rather than asking the parent to engage in an exchange of pleasantries, the teacher would probably be wise to proceed from the first greeting to making a brief comment or interesting anecdote about something good the child did or was involved in at school. This comment would be followed by a question to the parent about his or her perceptions of the child's progress and what the parents have observed at home. The conference would proceed as would a traditional face-to-face conference, except for the inability of the parent to see the child's work. The teacher, in describing the work, could invite the parent(s) in to see the work and/or could offer to have the child take the work home for an evening. A telephone conference does have drawbacks, but when successfully accomplished, it may serve to increase the chances of having the parent attend a future conference.

A telephone conference may also be used as a strategy for getting to know parents. Some teachers routinely call each parent to introduce themselves and convey the need for working together closely during the upcoming year. This personal touch is appreciated by most parents who are impressed with the teacher's willingness to involve them in their child's education. The teacher can tell the parent that future calls may be made to share the child's progress and that regularly scheduled conferences will provide a time for all parties to work together in developing a plan for future growth.

Telephone conferences may also be used to provide follow-up for face-to-face conferences. Sometimes the teacher needs to relate progress or lack of progress toward an agreed-upon goal. If an issue has already been discussed in a face-to-face conference, sharing updated information by telephone is both personal and efficient.

Notes about all telephone conferences should be recorded and placed in each parent-teacher conference folder. These records should reflect the date and time of call, objectives, outcomes, and teacher's perceptions. As with any other conference, information gained through a telephone conference is confidential and should be treated as such.

Confidentiality

We would probably be remiss if we did not emphasize the necessity for confidentiality in a chapter on parent-teacher conferencing. Although principals are usually very aware of the need for confidentiality and of the terrible consequences that can occur when confidentiality is not maintained, reminding teachers of confidentiality issues prior to conference time is probably a good idea. The principal must be the number-one advocate for the parent and for the child. Information shared in a parent-teacher conference cannot be shared in the teacher's lounge, with other parents, or with members of the community. The trust that parents place in teachers must be treated with respect and care. In conversing with a friend, one sometimes assumes that what is shared is *not confidential unless* the friend says that it is and asks that it not be repeated. In dealings with parents, *all* information shared should be treated as *strictly confidential.*

School leaders can protect the rights of parents and children by working to establish guidelines for the sharing of information within the school and with individuals or agencies outside of the school (Lawrence and Hunter 1978). Such guidelines may include permission to share information with other professionals who may be able to increase the teacher's effectiveness in working with the family and to increase the ability of other school personnel who will work with the same family. Sharing information with outside agencies should occur only after written permission from the parents or legal guardians has been obtained. Asking for parental consent to share information that would be helpful to another professional is always a good idea. It conveys respect for the parent's privacy and for the trust they have placed in the teacher. Especially when decisions are made concerning information to be forwarded to the next year's teacher and/or to another school building, the parent should be consulted before information gained through a parent-teacher conference is shared. The teacher might say to a parent, "This information would be helpful for Stacy's next teacher to have. How would you feel about my sharing it with him/her?" Finally, only the minimum information needed to help the child should be shared. Lengthy details are generally not necessary and should remain confidential, as should any notes the teacher took during the conference.

Other Two-Way Communication Strategies

In earlier chapters we discussed various strategies for providing opportunities for two-way communication between home and school, such as Open Houses, parent meetings, and parent education workshops. Face-to-face conferences and telephone conferences also present opportunities for conversation between the teacher and parents. In addition to these strategies, some teachers have found other ways to establish an ongoing dialogue with parents. Barbara Brinkman, a prekindergarten special-education teacher in Iowa, purchases a spiral-bound notebook for each child to take home every other day. In these dialogue journals, Barbara jots a note about each child, frequently including information about a classroom activity the parent can discuss with the child. The parent has an opportunity to respond in writing before sending the notebook back to school the following day. Mary Ramsaur (1992), a first-grade teacher in Fairbanks, Alaska, uses weekly journals to provide for three-way communication, among the child, parent, and teacher. The laminated cardboard-covered journal contains three color-coded pages: blue for teacher, yellow for parent, and white for child. In a cover letter Mary explains the purpose for the journal and asks that it be returned by Tuesday of each week. Mary asks parents to enjoy the children's invented spellings and artwork and to use manuscript print in responding on the front of the yellow sheet. On her blue sheet, Mary records specific information about the child's work habits and accomplishments during the week, as well as areas where assistance from the parent is needed. The child draws a picture about something that happened at school during the week and then either dictates or writes a sentence to accompany the drawing. The children also include a question for their parents to answer on the back of their response sheet.

SUMMARY

Working with parents is a *process* that takes time. Teachers must work hard to develop rapport and trust. Developing effective communication skills and conferencing strategies takes organization, time, and practice. Teachers often reveal anxiety at "doing or saying the wrong thing" when conferencing with parents. Yet, teachers who are well-prepared and who help parents feel prepared and comfortable are most likely to report conference satisfaction.

The professional confidence that comes with training and practice is a key element in effective conferencing. Not all conferences are successful—and a few are downright unpleasant! In this chapter we have shared strategies for planning and implementing a variety of parent-teacher and parent-teacher-child conferences. We have also conveyed the importance of communication skills training for teachers and for parents. Open and honest communication about a child's progress has great potential for helping each child achieve maximum growth. And, more so than any other parent involvement tool, the parent conference has the potential for building lasting partnerships between home and school.

For your consideration . . .

1. Conferences should provide an opportunity to review goals and formulate plans.
   Yes/ No
2. Conferences should be designed so as to facilitate a balanced look at all aspects of the child's development.
   Yes/No
3. Once administrative support has been secured, a district- or school-level committee, or the faculty and staff from each school, should develop an action plan for parent-teacher conferencing.
   Yes/No
4. Schools should employ full- or part-time staff who speak the major languages spoken at home and utilize such staff, if needed, to assist with conferences.
   Yes/No
5. Teachers should start off conferences on a positive note, first giving parents the opportunity to share their concerns.
   Yes/No

6. Children need to contribute to their parents' understanding of the their progress, and structured involvement of the child in the conference can be an excellent vehicle for doing so.
   Yes/No
7. When children are to participate in the conference, they can review their work samples and plan a presentation for their parents.
   Yes/No
8. Teachers should have an understanding of strategies for dealing with angry, verbally abusive parents.
   Yes/No
9. School leaders should protect the rights of parents and children by working to establish guidelines for the sharing of information within the school and with individuals or agencies outside of the school.
   Yes/No
10. A plan should be in place for reaching nonattending parents or, if necessary, a parental substitute.
    Yes/No
11. Schools should make every effort to reach one hundred percent of the families.
    Yes/No

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Chapter 10

Getting Parents and Community Members Involved: Keys to an Effective Volunteer Program

A note from Elizabeth . . .
"Parents don't really save any time, because I always have to tell them what to do" was a comment I heard from a teacher just before the parent involvement workshop I was conducting for another school. I don't know whether or not my presentation made an impact on the way this teacher felt about parents being involved in the classroom. Hopefully, she understood that the role parents play goes far beyond the classroom walls. It extends into the home—and even the community. The benefits far outweigh the time and efforts involved in "telling them what to do."

Unfortunately, many teachers erect barriers to parents' and other visitors' requests to visit the classroom. Good volunteer programs must be carefully planned, and the planning must begin with a look at the goals and objectives. Teachers must understand that the goal isn't to have parents duplicating papers or cutting out figures. While the positive attitude developed by parents and the services they render are *benefits*, the *primary* goal is for parents to become knowledgeable advocates in their child's education. Through their close association, volunteers gain a better understanding of the school and its programs and are more likely to show their support within the community.

In this chapter we will promote a broader definition of the traditional school volunteer, looking at ways that parents and community members "volunteer" their services inside as well as outside of the school building and the school day. We will also share characteristics and examples of a variety of effective school volunteer programs. Finally, we will emphasize the role that parents play as "volunteer teachers" supporting their children's education through home-learning activities and experiences.

Who Are Volunteers?

A note from Kathy . . .
I will never forget my oldest daughter's outcry which occurred in the grocery store late one afternoon. She was questioning whether I would accompany her class on a trip to the fire station. When I said I couldn't because I would be teaching a class at that time, she began wailing, very

> *loudly, saying "But everyone's mother is going. You have to go!" I felt so guilty. The next week, when the teacher asked for a volunteer to send in sprinkles for the cookies the class would bake, I was* so pleased *to have something I could contribute!*

Traditionally, school volunteers have assisted in the classroom, the library, the lunchroom, and on the playground. They have run off dittoes, collated and stapled papers, put up bulletin boards, and cut out game pieces. They have served as "room mothers," hosted class parties, accompanied students on field trips, and organized fund-raising activities. They have, in general, been an extra pair of hands ready to help out with a variety of school activities.

With increasingly large numbers of mothers in the workforce, traditional school volunteer programs have all but dissolved in many schools. The demise of the volunteer program not only forces teachers to assume even more tasks without assistance but also creates a gap in the home-school relationship. The fact is, *most elementary school children like to have their parents involved at school.* Every child wants his or her mother to help with the class party, or to chaperon the class on the field trip. With mothers holding down full-time jobs, not only are the children disappointed but also working mothers report feeling extremely *guilty* at not being involved in ways their own mothers were. If parent involvement is the school's goal, we must find ways to allow *all* parents to contribute, regardless of whether or not they are free to come into the building during the school day.

A *volunteer* might be defined as anyone who contributes services without receiving payment. Defined in this way, parents and other members of the community who perform a service or contribute in some way to the school—and who are not paid to do so—are volunteers. All too often schools fail to look beyond the parents of the children enrolled in the school, and beyond the school day, when they consider potential volunteers. This limited thinking results in lowered expectations for a volunteer program. Rather than looking for parents who are "free" between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., teachers and administrators should take stock of specific tasks that need to be accomplished and then consider who among the parents or community might be able to perform each task. While some of the tasks, such as those mentioned above, require being physically present at the school during the school day, a number of tasks can be completed outside of the building during nonschool hours. The principal of one school approached a local office supply company about photocopying the programs for the school play. The company agreed and even reduced samples of the children's writing and artwork to decorate the program. Parents volunteered to take stacks of programs home to collate, fold, and staple, since the programs were of a size that required doing these tasks by hand. Lynn Traser, a first-grade teacher in Macomb, Illinois, showed parents how to cover pieces of cardboard with wallpaper samples to make "blank books" for the students to write in. After the demonstration, parents made a book for their own child and then took home supplies needed for making additional blank books for classroom use. Parents of children enrolled in Camille Breheny's kindergarten class at St. Paul School in Macomb are asked to sign up to bring the homemade playdough at least once during the year. She provides the recipe. Parents also collect empty containers and "junk materials" used in various art projects throughout the year. Since the kindergartners engage in frequent cooking projects, parents are often asked to send in a cup of flour, sugar, cookie sprinkles, food coloring, or other ingredients. These donations save the school money and reduce the amount of out-of-pocket spending that Camille incurs. Most importantly, they provide an easy way for the parents—the majority of whom all work outside the home—to contribute.

In addition to parents of the children enrolled in the school, some schools involve older students. Structured programs, such as those administered by some high school home-living classes and Future Teachers of America groups, have made a wonderful contribution by providing classroom helpers and volunteer tutors who can work in the school during or after school hours. Schools that are in close proximity to a college or university often have interns or student teachers who work in the classrooms without receiving pay for their services. More informal arrangements, such as the use of "sixth-grade buddies" in Camille's kindergarten class, also provide the "extra hands, eyes, and ears" that early-childhood teachers need and appreciate. Senior citizens also serve as volunteers for many school systems. "Adopt-a-grandchild" programs, in which senior citizens "adopt" individual children or classrooms within a school, provide both children and adults with an enriching experience. Some "grandparents" offer to bake cookies, assist with classroom cooking or craft projects, sew "book bags" for the backs of chairs or desks, read to children, or listen to children read, to name a few of the many ways these individuals assist in classrooms.

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Involving retired citizens serves as a wonderful community relations program and also helps to meet the needs of children who need the loving care of an older person. Some of the children become very attached to their volunteer "grandmother." A relationship grows that lasts for years. Mrs. Hart had helped Jamie for a number of years. When she became ill, she sent her husband to help Jamie until she was able to return to school. I think they will be lifelong friends.

Individuals representing business and professional groups can assist schools in a variety of ways, from providing guest speakers to hosting field trips and donating supplies and materials. For example, during the last few years some discount stores have built collection boxes and started community-wide campaigns to gather school supplies for schools to give to children who cannot afford them. Some of the companies that manufacture school supplies have also made direct donations to the schools. Fast-food restaurants, working in conjunction with local soft-drink companies, have been known to donate to the schools a percentage of each drink purchased. Some schools participate in adopt-a-school programs and partnership arrangements with various businesses. These represent a form of volunteerism, to be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, which deals with fostering positive community relations.

Members of civic, service, and church groups are often quite active in helping the local schools. Organizing after-school tutoring and/or enrichment programs, coordinating programs such as Reading Is Fundamental, hosting fund raisers, and donating used clothing, materials, and supplies are among the many ways these groups volunteer their services to the schools.

In many communities the majority of the voters no longer have public-school-age children. In the next chapter we will discuss the importance of involving these individuals, as well as a variety of strategies for doing so. Securing volunteer services from this group is often difficult; however, efforts should be made to get them to serve. Community members who have special expertise in a particular area may be invited to share their knowledge with classes. Similarly, individuals who have traveled to other states and to foreign countries are often pleased to be asked to share their photographs and experiences with students who are studying that geographic area. Schools need to be creative in finding ways to involve parents of formerly enrolled children.

Involving Parents in the Classroom and School

Whether or not a formal volunteer program exists, parents and community members should be encouraged to visit the school and the classrooms. Parents and other adults can serve as casual visitors, participating in and lending assistance with classroom activities, meals, or celebrations. They can provide resources to extend and enrich opportunities for the children. They can also visit the classroom as observers to extend their knowledge of children's functioning in the classroom.

Development of a few simple guidelines for parents usually prevents problems anticipated by the teacher. For example, parents who come into the classroom to observe may be given a list of behaviors to look for. This might include children's abilities to work independently as well as cooperatively, work habits children exhibit, and strategies children use to solve problems and negotiate differences. Visitors coming in to share resources or lead an enrichment activity usually welcome receiving some direction from the teacher. Tips such as "Whenever possible include concrete objects and visuals in a presentation," "When sharing a visual give the children plenty of time to look and ask questions," "Speak in language the children will understand," and

"Plan on speaking no more than ten minutes before stopping for discussion" are examples of guidelines the teacher might set for guest speakers.

A number of schools are starting "publishing centers," where students' texts can be typed and bound in book form. Children work in their classrooms to plan, develop a rough draft, revise, and edit their pieces. Their work is then submitted to the publishing center, where it is typed by a parent volunteer. Spaces for illustrations are defined, and the pages are bound into a book. At Oakwood, parent volunteers cover cardboard with wallpaper to make the book covers. This task can be performed at the publishing center, or the parent can take the materials home. This is a very beneficial activity for parents, as it helps them understand how children become writers; and, through work with younger students, they gain an understanding of developmental spelling.

Many teachers conduct their own survey of parents' interests, hobbies, and areas of expertise. Figure 10.1 shows a survey used by Melissa Boardman in an attempt to solicit volunteers for her school's writing and publishing lab.

Some teachers record volunteer information on file cards. Using a database software program, Melissa recorded the information on computer for quick reference. Use of the computer for storing and organizing volunteer information makes it easy to change, add, or omit information in the future.

Having a file of volunteer service information is especially helpful when there is a specific task that needs to be done. For example, if fabric scraps are needed for a class project or if a cloth pocket chart needs to be replaced, a teacher might look in the file for a parent who listed sewing as an interest. It is important that all parents who respond to the survey indicating tasks they would be willing to perform *are asked* to volunteer. The teacher would work to involve all parents in some way, at some time during the year.

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Some of the parents who have the most time to donate also have the most doubts about their ability to assist. Oftentimes, their reluctance stems from their not having a high school diploma. Working to reassure these parents that they have an important role in the classroom is critical. Teachers model specific strategies for these parents to perform—and give them time to become comfortable before asking them to use the strategy with children. While parent volunteers assume various roles, the desired outcome is the same in every classroom: to show parents purposeful tasks they can undertake to contribute and feel useful.

Parents know they are performing a valuable service when they work as facilitators at the learning centers in Tracy Hudelson's kindergarten classroom

BICENTENNIAL WRITING/PUBLISHING LAB

Volunteer Sign-up Sheet

Parents are a very important part of a child's education. To make our lab a success, we need your help! We are hoping that you will volunteer your time at home and/or at school. Your help with our lab shows your child that you believe school is important. Please note: Each child who attends the lab needs your undivided attention; therefore we do ask that volunteers not be accompanied by preschool children. Please check those areas in which you'd be willing to help. Return this form to school with your child by September 15. THANKS!!

I would be willing to:

__________ type

__________ bind books

__________ cut materials

__________ file/categorize

__________ make book covers

__________ take dictation

__________ edit

__________ donate supplies

__________ become the materials coordinator

__________ become the volunteer coordinator

Please specify the time(s) which would work best for you:

Mondays _____ a.m.–_____ p.m. _____ after school

Tuesdays _____ a.m.–_____ p.m. _____ after school

Wednesdays _____ a.m.–_____ p.m. _____ after school

Thursdays _____ a.m.–_____ p.m. _____ after school

Fridays _____ a.m.–_____ p.m. _____ after school

__________ will help with home projects

______________________ Child's name

______________________ Classroom

______________________ Parent's signature

______________________ Date

Figure 10.1

at Oakwood School. While Tracy is involved in shared reading and/or writing experiences with a small group of students, parents help at the art center, the science center, or the math center. These volunteers sign up by the month, usually for one day each week. Tracy makes sure they know the objective and directions for each center. Children are very comfortable working with the parents, and parents know their help is extremely important.

The Role of a Volunteer Coordinator

During the last few years many districts have hired parent coordinators. Paid through parent involvement grant monies and state or district funds, these highly trained individuals work to coordinate the program in a district or school. When there is a parent coordinator, this person generally serves as volunteer coordinator also. Responsibilities include identifying the need for volunteers and the potential jobs that volunteers can do, organizing recruitment efforts, arranging training for teachers and orientation and training for volunteers, working with others to develop a volunteer handbook, maintaining records to document volunteer contributions, coordinating any special recognition and awards programs, and participating in on-going evaluation of the volunteer program. Where there is no one individual paid to fulfill these responsibilities, the building principal must provide the necessary leadership in seeing that these activities are carried out by various individuals on the school staff. Having a volunteer coordinator who is a parent volunteer may be a workable arrangement in some schools. In such cases, having one or two teachers serve as "volunteer liaisons" is helpful.

Characteristics of Effective Volunteer Programs

Although individual classroom teachers and individual schools within districts *can* maintain effective volunteer programs, the most successful programs are those in which there exists not only a school-level administrative commitment to volunteerism but also a district-level commitment. Involvement of all schools within the district is strongly supported by the district superintendent, central office staff, school board, and building principals. A unified effort results in a marked increase in the number of parents who get involved and stay involved throughout their children's school careers. Civic, service, and religious organizations, as well as businesses and professional groups, are also more likely to be active supporters of the schools when the expectation for volunteerism is held districtwide.

While some districtwide planning for volunteerism may exist, each individual school's staff is actively involved in the planning of the volunteer program at their school (see Figure 10.2). Brainstorming a list of tasks that volunteers could perform, identifying potential volunteer groups as well as individual volunteers, conducting surveys as to potential volunteers' willingness to support the school through out-of-school or in-school activities, generating guidelines for classroom and school volunteers, developing a volunteer handbook and training program, and planning for ongoing appreciation of volunteers are among the planning activities in which school staff members may participate.

Planning for Volunteers: Sample Guidelines for Getting Started

- Meet with school personnel to develop a common understanding of the benefits, goals, and objectives of a volunteer program.
- Appoint volunteer coordinator(s) and/or liaisons.
- Survey needs, considering activities that can be conducted both in the school and out of school.
- Identify potential volunteers.
- Write job descriptions for various volunteer jobs.
- Plan and implement a variety of recruitment activities.
- Identify interests/skills of potential volunteers.
- Determine training/orientation needs of teachers.
- Determine training/orientation needs of volunteers.
- Develop training/orientation programs.
- Develop volunteer handbooks for volunteers and teachers.
- Conduct training and orientation programs for volunteers and teachers.
- Develop record-keeping devices/forms.
- Plan ways to recognize and reward volunteer contributions.
- Plan ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Figure 10.2

Schools with the most successful volunteer programs have active and continuous recruitment designed to bring new volunteers into the school throughout the year. This necessitates ongoing placement, orientation, and training of volunteers. Although these activities take time, so does building and maintaining a quality volunteer program that yields consistent benefits in terms of parent and community involvement and support. A frequent flaw among volunteer programs is the once-a-year recruitment and placement of volunteers. Not only does this result in fewer volunteers, it also contributes to volunteer "burn out." Not many individuals want to be stuck in the same job for a long period of time; most prefer some variety and change. Schools that provide a vehicle for volunteers to switch activities periodically, if desired, have a better track record when it comes to retention of volunteers.

Orientation activities should be designed to help the volunteers get to know the program, learn "who's who" and "what's where," and become acquainted with the expectations held for the job they will assume. For in-school volunteers, the orientation would include getting to know the facility, including where they will work, where supplies are kept, where they can store a sack lunch, location of vending machines, where they can eat, and so forth. A volunteer handbook can be immensely helpful and should include policies and procedures of the volunteer program, such as attendance, childcare, transportation, sign-in, confidentiality, and general responsibilities. In addition, the handbook should include the school philosophy and mission statements,

Volunteer Program Policies and Procedures

1. *Attendance*: This information would include the importance of regular attendance, as well as whom to call if the volunteer will be absent. Procedures for signing-in on arrival and signing-out on departure could also be included.
2. *Childcare:* If childcare is to be provided, the name of the person to talk with about arrangements would be included in this section. If no childcare is to be arranged, a statement as to whether or not younger siblings will be permitted in the building could be included.
3. *Transportation:* Carpooling arrangements, busing, and other sources of transportation would be included, along with the names of individuals to contact about transportation needs and services.
4. *Record-keeping logs:* Procedures for keeping track of volunteer hours and service would be explained in this section.
5. *Confidentiality:* A discussion of confidentiality would include what information is considered confidential and potential consequences if confidentiality is not kept. A form for volunteers to sign promising to maintain confidentiality would be included.
6. *Emergency situations:* What to do in the case of emergencies would be included in this section. Procedures to follow in the event of natural disasters, fires, playground or school building accidents involving a child, parent, staff member or other volunteer would be specified.

Figure 10.3

name/job title/position and room or office number for all school personnel, school calendar and daily schedules, a map of the school, and school policies and procedures that impact on the volunteer program. Figure 10.3 is a list of sample policies to be included in a volunteer handbook.

A written job description is recommended for each position. This job description will help volunteers understand how their position fits into the larger picture and will also give them an idea of other positions they may like to fill. The training planned would depend on the requirements for each job and may include observation of live or videotaped demonstrations of tasks to be performed, role-playing, and/or supervised practice. In planning training opportunities, staff members need to consider not only the tasks associated with each job but also the special terms or "jargon" used. For example, *duty roster, lunch count, collating, time-out* are terms used daily in most schools. They may not, however, be familiar to new volunteers. Identification of a supervisor for each volunteer is also important and may be linked to the training program. A classroom volunteer would most likely be trained and supervised by an individual classroom teacher, whereas clerical volunteers may be trained and supervised by the school secretary. In systems where there is a paid parent coordinator, this person is often responsible for placing, training, and supervising volunteers. For example, training for volunteers with classroom responsibilities typically includes how to work with children, the importance of talking with and listening to children, tips for reading aloud to children, how to help children solve problems, and positive guidance techniques. The training for volunteers not working in classrooms generally includes how to perform specific tasks and where to get materials, supplies, and assistance. In the "Lasting Impressions" parent program in the Quincy, Illinois, public school system, coordinator Peg Simon asks teachers to contribute to a "teachers' job box," those tasks volunteers can perform in the volunteer workroom or at home. When a volunteer has a few moments, Peg will pull something out of the job box and demonstrate the task. Parents who have been made aware of the job box will often stop by to see if there's anything they can take home.

Another characteristic of successful volunteer efforts is program evaluation. In schools where there is a regular and thorough evaluation of the volunteer program and where changes are made as indicated by the evaluation results, the program is, understandably, more successful. Ongoing evaluation occurs throughout the year as data are kept regarding number of volunteers, including retention rate, services rendered, hours contributed (both in and outside of the school building), and dollar amount donated (both in direct donations and in labor and services). Periodic analysis of these data enables the school leaders to make changes as needed before the program is unduly affected. At least once a year, a more in-depth and comprehensive evaluation takes place, with surveys conducted to ascertain teacher and volunteer satisfaction and to determine future direction of the volunteer program. At this time recruitment procedures, methods for orienting and training volunteers, information in the volunteer handbook, and means of showing appreciation for volunteers would also be reviewed and revised as warranted before the next academic year.

Finally, in schools where teachers and school leaders engage in frequent volunteer appreciation activities, more volunteer satisfaction and higher rates of retention exist. The ways schools show appreciation for volunteers include personal on-the-spot expressions; highlighting volunteers and volunteer activities on a school bulletin board or in the school or classroom newsletter; sending photographs and articles about the volunteer program to the local newspapers; including volunteers in staff/faculty events, as appropriate; hosting special luncheons, teas, potlucks or coffees; writing letters of appreciation; and giving out end-of-the-year certificates and awards, such as caps, T-shirts, or coffee mugs with the school logo. Regardless of the type of appreciation activities planned, volunteers should know that their services are needed and useful. The best appreciation activities are those that are sincere and personal and that do not consume large amounts of time for school personnel or for volunteers. For example, knowing each volunteers' name and recognizing each volunteer with a smile and a personal greeting is one important way to show ongoing appreciation. Some schools have special name tags with the name of the school, the volunteer's name, and the word *volunteer* written underneath. This simple gesture helps give volunteers a feeling of importance and belonging and lets them know that school personnel recognize and appreciate their presence.

Recruitment of Volunteers

The best recruitment strategy is personal contact. Principals and teachers who reach out to parents and community members and who take the time to explain school and/or classroom goals are more likely to be successful in their efforts to solicit volunteer services. One-to-one contact with parents and parents of former students, as well as group contact through presentations to civic, service, professional, and religious groups, result in increased school support. For example, school leaders at Washington School in Quincy, Illinois, prepared a fifteen- to twenty-minute presentation that includes showing a video filmed at the school. The presentation was delivered at the meetings of numerous organizations, along with a brief brochure about the school and ways the community could be involved and supportive. The school succeeded in garnering the support of various individuals and organizations that signed up as "guest readers" and which supplied various needed materials, supplies, and services throughout the year. Among the many services and programs the school offers is a "beauty parlor" and a "clothing store" staffed by volunteers. Children in need can get assistance in washing their bodies and hair and in finding clean, good used clothing. This service results in more children who feel good about themselves and who are learning to care for and take pride in their physical appearance.

Other recruitment strategies involve writing articles for school and classroom newsletters; arranging for feature articles in the local newspaper; placing brochures and recruitment information in the offices of local health departments, doctors, dentists, and attorneys; asking banks and department stores to put information in bank statements and bills; and sharing information at booths set up at local malls, shopping centers, and stores, as well as during school events, fairs, and trade shows.

Recruitment of parents should include reasons why they should volunteer their services to their child's school. Reasons cited may include: (1) teachers and children need their help, (2) parents are already experienced in working with at least their own child, and (3) their child will be proud of their involvement and will benefit from their contributions. Recruitment of community members, as well as parents, should include a note about the opportunity for volunteers to work in areas where they feel comfortable and productive and the fact that volunteers can contribute services and goods both in and outside of the school building and the regular school day. A list of potential jobs that volunteers might contribute should be included in the recruitment information. This list could include school projects such as building, repairing, or installing playground equipment; planting trees and shrubs; building bookshelves, reading lofts, and other classroom furnishings; repairing equipment; and organizing toy/book/clothing exchanges. Other jobs could be categorized according to classroom-related tasks, such as tutoring, reading to children, listening to children read, showing videos and filmstrips, playing games, supervising learning centers, supervising computer and bookmaking activities, talking about their country of origin, and sharing music, art, or games of their culture, to name a few of the many potential jobs for in-classroom volunteers. Tasks listed under a category for out-of-school contributions might include furnishing refreshments, writing/typing newsletters, coordinating volunteers, furnishing dress-up clothes and/or costumes, collecting recycled materials for use in classroom projects, providing childcare for another volunteer's children, serving on a telephone committee, washing art shirts, and cleaning and repairing toys and dolls used in the prekindergarten and kindergarten programs.

Whenever possible, recruitment activities should be personal and should be geared to a specific task or tasks—for example, soliciting volunteers to build or install new playground equipment, getting someone to clean and repair toys and dolls, or asking a service organization to organize the Reading Is Fundamental program or a book fair. Individuals will often agree to a "task-specific" job rather than sign up for what they may view as a long-term commitment. Once individuals make a positive contribution to the school and are appreciated for their contribution, they are more likely to volunteer their services in the future.

Teachers' Responsibilities for Classroom Volunteers

Before volunteers arrive the teachers need to have a plan for what they will do. Starting with simple but meaningful tasks, such as listening to children read, is usually a good idea. The experiences planned should give the volunteers a sense of accomplishment and reward and be neither too challenging nor too simplistic. Finding out special interests or talents of each volunteer is helpful. A parent with musical or artistic ability may really enjoy working with the children in those areas, whereas someone without skill or interest in these areas may be very uncomfortable being asked to do so. Whatever the task, the instructions need to be very clearly stated, orally and in writing, and all materials and supplies need to be readily available. The teacher should also talk with the children about the volunteer and his or her role in the classroom.

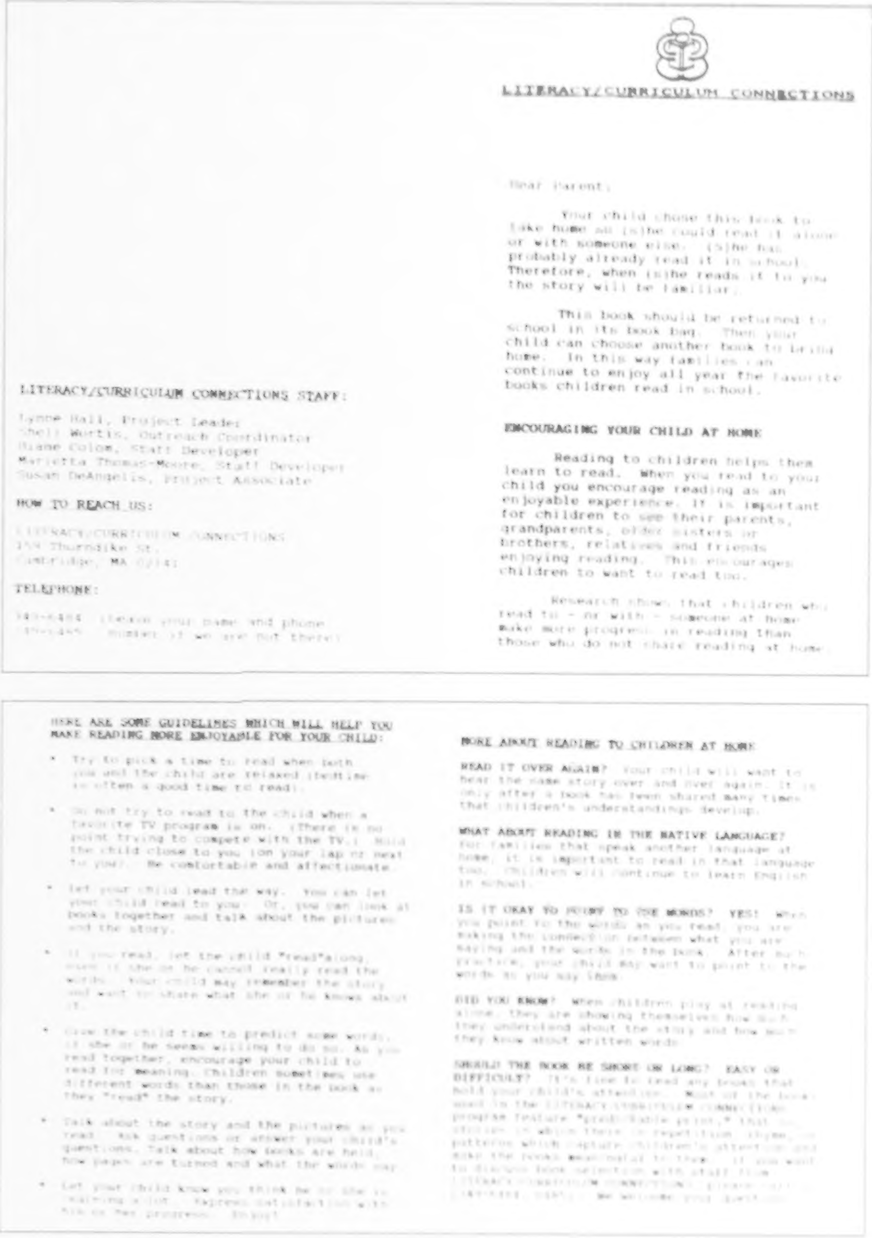
Ideally, each teacher and volunteer should have an opportunity to meet to discuss the tasks as well as discuss classroom procedures and rules when children are not in the room. In addition to explaining specific tasks and gaining the volunteer's input and suggestions, the teacher should reassure the volunteer that the teacher will step in if necessary to remind a child of classroom rules. When the volunteer arrives for the first day with the children present, the teacher should introduce the volunteer to the children, making the volunteer feel as welcome as possible. Showing where to put personal belongings and giving reminders as to the location of the restroom, workroom, and vending machines is also helpful. If possible, the teacher and volunteer should have some time together after this first experience to discuss how everything went and any questions the volunteer might have. Keeping in touch through personal contact and message boards is important, though not always easy. Teachers have to really make an effort to find time meet with the volunteer to discuss plans and evaluate activities. Although this adds yet another task to the teacher's busy week, the time spent will pay off in terms of the increased contributions the volunteer will be able to make. In time, most teachers wonder how they ever got along without these wonderful classroom volunteers!

In-service for Teachers

When teachers have an opportunity to participate in a training session on effective use of volunteers, fewer initial problems are encountered. Similarly, if problems are mounting in an existing program, this may be an indication of the need for a refresher training session. The training program for teachers needs to be separate from the planning sessions held to organize the program and should include information about planning for and using volunteers, both in and out of the classroom. Communicating with volunteers is a topic that bears ample discussion. How to clearly explain tasks and expectations and how to convey constructive criticism are two common topics needing attention. For teachers who are expected to train volunteers to perform task-specific classroom jobs, some assistance in developing training materials and handouts might be needed.

Parents' In-home "Volunteer" Contributions

Parents need to know that their efforts to stay informed and involved in their child's learning activities at home represent some of the most significant volunteer contributions that can possibly be made. Parents frequently ask, "How can I help my child at home?" *All* parents should be involved in reading to their child, listening to their child talk and read, helping their child with homework, and providing out-of-school experiences that enrich the child's learning. Parents can also volunteer their time to work with their child on home-learning activities that require adult-child interaction. The research cited in Chapter 1 regarding the effectiveness of home-learning activities in boosting student achievement has triggered an increase in use of what Joyce Epstein at the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University calls *interactive homework assignments*. Teachers are sometimes paid to work together to develop assignments matched to their



LITERACY/CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Dear Parent:

Your child chose this book to take home so (s)he could read it alone or with someone else. (S)he has probably already read it in school. Therefore, when (s)he reads it to you the story will be familiar.

This book should be returned to school in its book bag. Then your child can choose another book to bring home. In this way families can continue to enjoy all year the favorite books children read in school.

ENCOURAGING YOUR CHILD AT HOME

Reading to children helps them learn to read. When you read to your child you encourage reading as an enjoyable experience. It is important for children to see their parents, grandparents, older sisters or brothers, relatives and friends enjoying reading. This encourages children to want to read too.

Research shows that children who read to - or with - someone at home make more progress in reading than those who do not share reading at home.

LITERACY/CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS STAFF:

Lynne Hall, Project Leader
Sheli Wortis, Outreach Coordinator
Diane Colom, Staff Developer
Marietta Thomas-Moore, Staff Developer
Susan DeAngelis, Project Associate

HOW TO REACH US:

LITERACY/CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
159 Thorndike St.
Cambridge, MA 02141

TELEPHONE:

349-6484 (leave your name and phone
[illegible] number if we are not there)

HERE ARE SOME GUIDELINES WHICH WILL HELP YOU MAKE READING MORE ENJOYABLE FOR YOUR CHILD:

- Try to pick a time to read when both you and the child are relaxed (bedtime is often a good time to read).
- Do not try to read to the child when a favorite TV program is on. (There is no point trying to compete with the TV.) Hold the child close to you (on your lap or next to you). Be comfortable and affectionate.
- Let your child lead the way. You can let your child read to you. Or, you can look at books together and talk about the pictures and the story.
- If you read, let the child "read"along, even if she or he cannot really read the words. Your child may remember the story and want to share what she or he knows about it.
- Give the child time to predict some words, if she or he seems willing to do so. As you read together, encourage your child to read for meaning. Children sometimes use different words than those in the book as they "read" the story.
- Talk about the story and the pictures as you read. Ask questions or answer your child's questions. Talk about how books are held, how pages are turned and what the words say.
- Let your child know you think he or she is learning a lot. Express satisfaction with his or her progress. Enjoy!

MORE ABOUT READING TO CHILDREN AT HOME

READ IT OVER AGAIN? Your child will want to hear the same story over and over again. It is only after a book has been shared many times that children's understandings develop.

WHAT ABOUT READING IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE? For families that speak another language at home, it is important to read in that language too. Children will continue to learn English in school.

IS IT OKAY TO POINT TO THE WORDS? YES! When you point to the words as you read, you are making the connection between what you are saying and the words in the book. After such practice, your child may want to point to the words as you say them.

DID YOU KNOW? When children play at reading alone, they are showing themselves how much they understand about the story and how much they know about written words.

SHOULD THE BOOK BE SHORT OR LONG? EASY OR DIFFICULT? It's fine to read any books that hold your child's attention. Most of the books used in the LITERACY/CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS program feature "predictable print," that is, stories in which there is repetition, rhyme, or patterns which capture children's attention and make the books meaningful to them. If you want to discuss book selection with staff from LITERACY/CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS, please call [illegible]. We welcome your questions.

Figure 10.4

own curricula and learning objectives. The assignments are used throughout the year with students and their families and are then revised based on feedback and evaluation from students, parents, and teachers. Teachers who devise home-learning activities that require adult and child interaction find that most parents readily volunteer to participate in these activities with their children.

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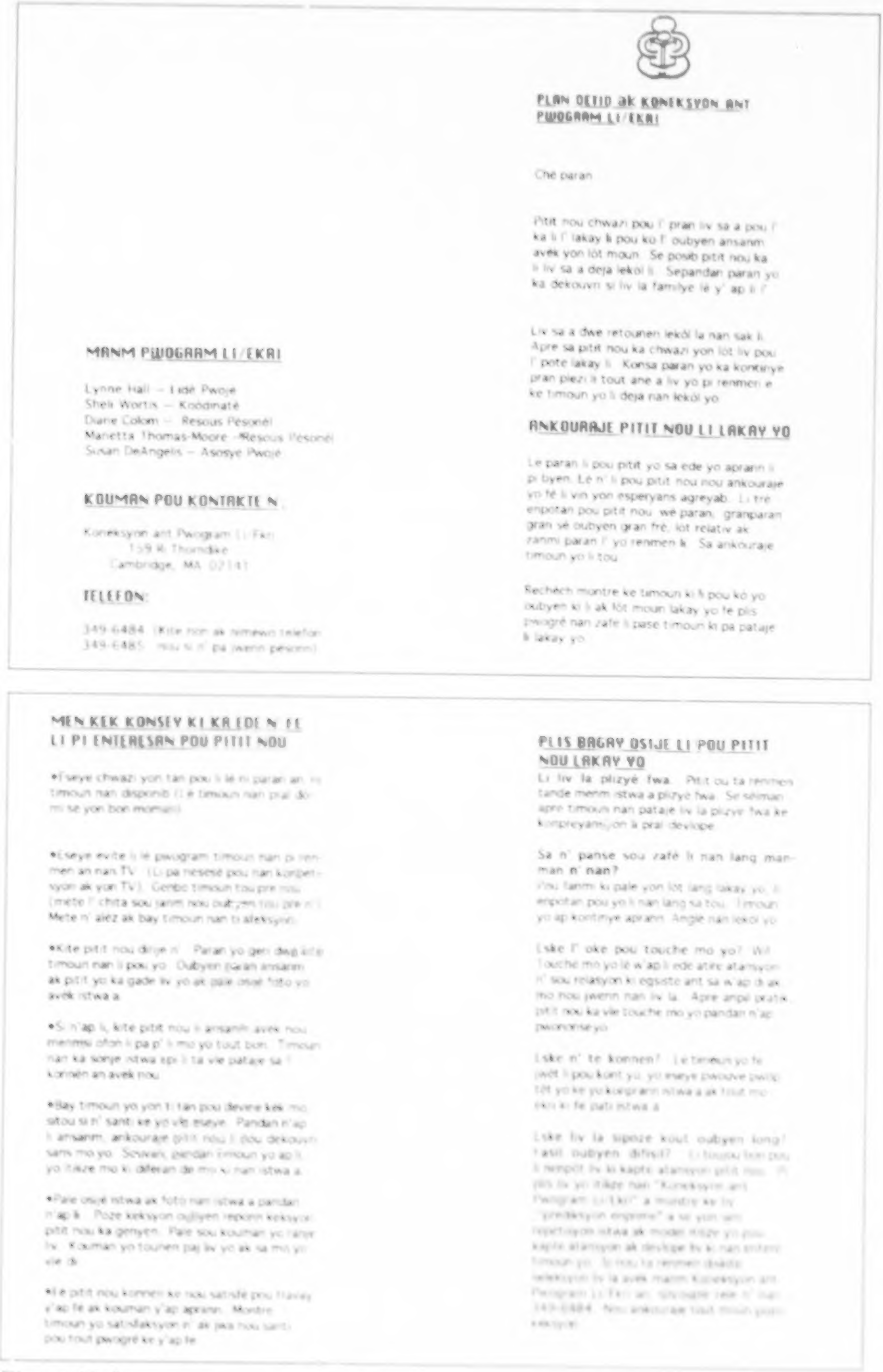

PLAN DETID ak KONEKSYON ANT PWOGRAM LI/EKRI

Chè paran

Pitit nou chwazi pou l' pran liv sa a pou l' ka li l' lakay li pou ko l' oubyen ansanm avèk yon lòt moun. Se posib pitit nou ka li liv sa a deja lekòl li. Sepandan paran yo ka dekouvri si liv la familye lè y' ap li l'.

Liv sa a dwe retounen lekòl la nan sak li. Apre sa pitit nou ka chwazi yon lòt liv pou l' pote lakay li. Konsa paran yo ka kontinye pran plezi li tout ane a liv yo pi renmen e ke timoun yo li deja nan lekòl yo.

ANKOURAJE PITIT NOU LI LAKAY YO

Lè paran li pou pitit yo sa ede yo aprann li pi byen. Lè n' li pou pitit nou nou ankouraje yo fè li vin yon esperyans agreyab. Li trè enpòtan pou pitit nou wè paran, granparan, gran sè oubyen gran frè, lòt relativ ak zanmi paran l' yo renmen li. Sa ankouraje timoun yo li tou.

Rechèch montre ke timoun ki li pou kò yo oubyen ki li ak lòt moun lakay yo fè plis pwogrè nan zafè li pase timoun ki pa pataje li lakay yo.

MANM PWOGRAM LI/EKRI

Lynne Hall — Lidè Pwojè
Sheli Wortis — Koòdinatè
Diane Colom — Resous Pèsonèl
Marietta Thomas-Moore —Resous Pèsonèl
Susan DeAngelis — Asosye Pwojè

KOUMAN POU KONTAKTE N:

Koneksyon ant Pwogram Li/Ekri
159 Ri Thorndike
Cambridge, MA 02141

TELEFON:

349-6484 (Kite non ak nimewo telefòn
349-6485 nou si n' pa jwenn pèsonn)

MEN KEK KONSEY KI KA EDE N FE LI PI ENTERESAN POU PITIT NOU

- Eseye chwazi yon tan pou li lè ni paran an, ni timoun nan disponib (Lè timoun nan prał dòmi se yon bon moman).

- Eseye evite li lè pwogram timoun nan pi renmen an nan TV. (Li pa nesesè pou nan konpetisyon ak yon TV). Genbo timoun tou pre nou (mete l' chita sou janm nou oubyen tou pre n'). Mete n' alèz ak bay timoun nan ti atansyon.

- Kite pitit nou dirije n'. Paran yo gen dwa kite timoun nan li pou yo. Oubyen paran ansanm ak pitit yo ka gade liv yo ak pale osijè foto yo avèk istwa a.

- Si n'ap li, kite pitit nou li ansanm avèk nou menmsi ofon li pa p' li mo yo tout bon. Timoun nan ka sonje istwa epi li ta vle pataje sa l' konnèn an avèk nou.

- Bay timoun yo yon ti tan pou devine kèk mo sitou si n' santi ke yo vle eseye. Pandan n'ap li ansanm, ankouraje pitit nou li pou dekouvri sans mo yo. Souvan, pandan timoun yo ap li, yo itilize mo ki diferan de mo ki nan istwa a.

- Pale osijè istwa ak foto nan istwa a pandan n'ap li. Poze kesyon oubyen reponn kesyon pitit nou ka genyen. Pale sou kouman yo renmen liv. Kouman yo tounen paj liv yo ak sa mo yo vle di.

- Fè pitit nou konnen ke nou satisfè pou travay y'ap fè ak kouman y'ap aprann. Montre timoun yo satisfaksyon n' ak jwa nou santi pou tout pwogrè ke y'ap fè.

PLIS BAGAY OSIJE LI POU PITIT NOU LAKAY YO

Li liv la plizyè fwa. Pitit ou ta renmen tande menm istwa a plizyè fwa. Se sèlman apre timoun nan pataje liv la plizyè fwa ke konprevansyon li prał devlope.

Sa n' panse sou zafè li nan lang manman n' nan? Pou fanmi ki pale yon lòt lang lakay yo, li enpòtan pou yo li nan lang sa tou. Timoun yo ap kontinye aprann Anglè nan lekòl yo.

Eske l' oke pou touche mo yo? Wi. Touche mo yo lè w'ap li ede atire atansyon n' sou relasyon ki egsiste ant sa w'ap di ak mo nou jwenn nan liv la. Apre anpil pratik pitit nou ka vle touche mo yo pandan n'ap pwononse yo.

Eske n' te konnen? Lè timoun yo fè jwèt li pou kont yo, yo eseye pwouve pwòp tèt yo ke yo konprann istwa a ak tout mo ekri ki fè pati istwa a.

Eske liv la sipoze kout oubyen long? Fasil oubyen difisil? Li [illegible] li nenpòt liv ki kapte atansyon pitit nou. [illegible] liv yo itilize nan "Koneksyon ant Pwogram Li/Ekri" a montre ke liv "prediksyon engrenne" a se yon seri repetisyon istwa ak model itilize yo pou kapte atansyon ak devlope liv ki nan enterè timoun yo. Si nou ta renmen diskite seleksyon liv la avèk manm Koneksyon ant Pwogram Li/Ekri an, tanpri rele n' nan 349-6484. Nou ankouraje tout moun poze kesyon.

Figure 10.5

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Parents also report feeling good about their ability to help with the academic development of their children.

In a program funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Education, parents, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers from the Cambridge schools are involved in Literacy/Curriculum Connections (LCC). This program seeks to make reading and writing meaningful for young children by making print an exciting part of the children's lives. During the year, the Home Reading Program provides an opportunity for children in participating classrooms to borrow favorite books that may be read at home with parents or other family members. Workshops, forums, and other events are scheduled to acquaint parents and community members with strategies used in the program. In Figures 10.4 and 10.5 are examples of materials sent home to families. All materials are distributed in four languages: English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese. In addition, a large poster, conceived, written, and developed by Literacy/Curriculum Connections staff and other teachers, was produced with the help of the Cambridge Partnership for Public Information, a collaboration between local corporations, universities, and the public school system. The Partnership solicited the help of a corporate graphic artist, and one business printed ten thousand copies of the poster. The poster identifies, in photos with some explanatory text, stages in the development of talking, reading, and writing, from infancy to competency.

SUMMARY

Involving parents and community members in volunteer activities reaps many benefits. These individuals can actively support the school by volunteering goods and services to be performed either in or outside of the school building. According to research, having volunteers visible in the school building shows that the school is open to them and that teachers are willing to work with parents and community members to provide the best possible education for all children.

Following is a list of questions that may serve to help you clarify your beliefs about the role of volunteers in the school program. In addition, these questions may serve as a starting point for a school staff to begin to examine the development of a volunteer program.

For your consideration . . .

1. There are a number of tasks that volunteers could undertake to help our school.
   Yes/No
2. The teachers and the children would benefit from assistance from classroom volunteers.
   Yes/No

3. The school would benefit from increased involvement of community members.
   Yes/No
4. Parents should be asked to contribute service to the school.
   Yes/No
5. Community members should be asked to contribute service to the school.
   Yes/No
6. A variety of options for service should be provided for parents and community members.
   Yes/No

Chapter 11

School-Community Partnerships: Fostering Positive Public Relations

A note from Elizabeth . . .
When Benjamin Franklin came to Oakwood School I had no trouble getting newspaper coverage—thanks to the relationship I had already established with the local newspaper's education feature writer. She knew I would never waste her time, that the event would be "newsworthy," and that children would always be involved—which always helps in the sale of newspapers. The actor portraying Benjamin Franklin was so realistic we even received front-page coverage!

Education is a cooperative enterprise that is most successful when everyone accepts and exercises personal responsibility. In the preceding chapters we emphasized the schools' role in involving parents in their children's education. Attention has been given to communicating with parents and providing parent education opportunities. In the previous chapter we discussed strategies for involving parents and community members in ways that directly benefit the school, the teachers, and the children. In this chapter we examine the positive benefits schools are afforded when they enjoy the reputation of being a "good school." Strategies for enhancing public relations and fostering community involvement through a variety of classroom and school projects and procedures will be shared.

Building Public Relations: Planning for Action

Schools that make regular use of the media and do everything they can to let their public know how "good" they are usually do not have a public relations problem. Unfortunately, much of the good news about education is only shared among educators. Studies show that there are now more adults with no school age children than ever before. Since most of the information about the schools is shared through word-of-mouth and the newspaper, educators need to be certain that the good news gets at least as much coverage as the bad news. Public relations can be defined as the methods and/or activities employed to promote a favorable relationship with the public. Business and industry have the right idea when they hire public relations experts to promote their products and services. Schools would do well to employ some of the same strategies used by not only business and industry but also by institutions of higher education in promoting their mission to the public. While few if any school districts can afford to hire full-time public relations experts, school leaders do need to ensure that certain tasks associated with public relations are getting done. Consistency in maintaining close, regular contact with the public is a key to good public relations—and to support at the polls!

Development of a plan for public relations facilitates action and progress toward an improved school-community relationship. Such a plan includes specific objectives that, when accomplished, lead to enhanced public relations. For each objective, the tasks or activities to be completed and a time line for doing so are listed along with names of individuals responsible for accomplishing each. One activity might be to make a videotape of the school to be shown at meetings of civic, service, and professional organizations. A copy of the video could be sent to "feeder" schools and daycare centers, as well as to city officials and legislators. Brochures and other printed information, and a brief presentation by the principal and key teachers, could accompany the video showings.

As the old saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." There's just nothing like getting individuals into the school for garnering support and increasing community awareness. Some schools host various groups of individuals for school tours and coffee. Family day, senior citizens' day, grandparents' day, retired educators' day, bankers' day, real estate agents' day—the possibilities are endless! A thirty- to forty-five-minute tour by the principal or another staff member is generally sufficient for giving these individuals a glimpse of the school, its programs, teachers, and students. Each visit should conclude with information as to how these individuals could support the school, including a description of the volunteer program and any particular needs facing the school at that time.

Schools should also remember to take advantage of existing publications for disseminating information about the school. There should be routine sharing of the newsletter with representatives of community organizations. In addition, these and other appropriate school publications should be placed in the offices of doctors, dentists, attorneys, and real estate agents, as well as at public health centers and other locations in the community.

Working with the Media

A media representative who is interested in the school and who recognizes the importance of portraying a positive public image for the school is one of the best friends a school can have. Getting to know the local media staff members is important, and establishing a relationship with these individuals is sometimes more readily accomplished when fewer school personnel are responsible for communicating directly with the media. Generally, the principal or principal designee and a central office administrator serve as media contact persons. The school media contact person should determine which media representatives are responsible for covering school events and should issue frequent invitations for these individuals to visit the school. Every effort should be made to determine their special interests and ideas for keeping the community informed about the educational system. Having a good relationship with the media representatives is helpful for schools in determining priority "news." Schools have many interesting programs and activities; however, not all are appealing to the general public. Stories that feature new methods or techniques, such as use of technology, and stories that illustrate other, more complex issues such as accountability and curriculum reform, are likely to pique the public's interest. Special events and programs involving the children are covered by the media when time and space allow. In larger cities with many more schools, gaining media coverage is often more difficult. Maintaining a strong relationship with the media representative—and carefully selecting news to be shared—becomes even more important.

The school media contact person would be responsible for sending news releases to the various media representatives. Sometimes one medium works better than another to publicize a particular story or event. For example, since television is a visual medium, a story conveyed through an interesting scene is more likely to attract the interest of a television reporter. "Talking heads" in a television interview and "grip and grin" photographs of two individuals shaking hands or exchanging a check or certificate do not command the most interest.

It's also a good idea to consider whom the school wants to reach with each message—and, when necessary, to tailor messages to fit the intended audience. For example, which radio station, television station, and print media are likely to reach senior citizens? professionals? members of business and church groups? New residents? Depending on the location of the school, print resources might include daily newspapers, weekly shoppers' guides, local TV guides, local magazines, and inserts in billing statements. Church bulletins, company newsletters, and college newspapers may also be an appropriate avenue in some communities for sharing school-related news.

Since most media representatives prefer to write their own copy, school personnel can assist by giving the necessary facts as early as possible so as to allow for media representatives to call for additional information, schedule photographers, and write their own story. Newspaper reporters work from an "inverted pyramid" format when they develop a story. This format is recommended for school personnel who write news stories for submission to local papers. The most important information should be first, in case the article gets cut short due to space constraints. When enlisting the media's assistance in publicizing an upcoming event, the recommendation is to follow a "who, what, when, where" format and include a contact person and phone number where that person can be reached. All news releases should be typed double-spaced, with a heading that reads "For Immediate Release" or "For Release after . . ." and the appropriate date. Get information about the amount of "lead time" media representatives need when covering stories and deadlines for regular submissions. A good rule of thumb is to make the initial contact two to three weeks in advance. However, when "Benjamin Franklin" was to visit Oakwood School, the newspaper staff person was contacted approximately one week in advance. A follow-up telephone call placed the morning of the event served as a reminder for the photographer.

Since most schools are at one time or another faced with a negative situation where news media and the public want information, it is important that all school personnel know who is to issue such information. In most cases the district superintendent, the school board president, or the school principal deal with the media. Sometimes, however, a reporter may contact a teacher directly. It is important that everyone knows the procedure for handling requests for information—whether the information requested is positive or negative. First of all, the school person should ask for the reporter's name and affiliation. If the school person receiving the call is the best person to respond to the question or request, a face-to-face meeting should be arranged whenever possible. If a telephone interview is to be conducted and the reporter has called without prior notice, it is generally most appropriate for the school representative to ask the reporter to call back at a specified time. This allows the school person time to gather thoughts and support materials. If the reporter represents a radio station, the school representative should ask if the conversation is being taped for broadcast and should plan accordingly. When speaking with radio and television reporters, the school representative should be as brief as possible. As when conversing with parents, the school representative should use language that is free of educational jargon and clearly understandable to the general public. Finally, school personnel should understand that everything they say to a reporter—even in a social setting—may end up in print. It has been said that educators are their own worst enemies, for many are all too quick to complain to neighbors, friends, and acquaintances about what they see wrong with the school or school system. If we want to portray a positive image to our public, if we want to instill confidence in others insofar as the school's ability to provide children with a good education, if we want to build a strong relationship with our community, then we must refrain from being bearers of bad news. Instead, we must learn to toot our own horns—and toot them loudly, clearly, boldly, and often.

Community Involvement: Working to Overcome Obstacles

Researchers such as Shirley Brice Heath and Milbrey McLaughlin (1991) have questioned the adequacy of the schools as social institutions "because they are built on outmoded assumptions about family and community" (623). Many children are no longer raised in stable communities where neighbors, parents, and teachers all know one another and share similar views. Dramatic changes in family structures, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, have made a strong impact on the school as a social institution. Similarly, the changing faces of neighborhoods—many of which have seen the closing of small businesses, a decrease in the impact of social institutions, and loss of the neighborhood school—have contributed to marked changes in what were once regarded as "our schools." As stated by Edwards and Young (1992), "Just as most schools have not yet figured out how to facilitate strong parent involvement, neither have they adjusted well to new family and community realities" (76). School leaders, in collaboration with teachers and parent representatives, must think carefully about what schools expect from communities. Mobilizing resources within the community to enhance the learning experience for children is critical today. Historically, schools did not "do it alone." They had the support of close-knit neighborhoods, extended families of children, and local small businesses. In recent years, however, the changes that have taken place in homes, communities, and in schools and school districts have placed incredible responsibilities on school personnel who have been asked to perform an increasing number of nonteaching-related tasks. According to results of the twenty-fifth Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Elam, Rose, and Gallup 1993), the public strongly favors the provision of health and social services by their local schools. Specific services cited include: vision and hearing examinations, free or low-cost breakfasts and lunches, inoculations against communicable diseases, after-school care for children of working parents, and dental examinations. While tending to the social, emotional, physical, and psychological needs of students cannot be overlooked, schools must have substantial support from not only the parents but also the community-at-large.

Maintaining a "presence" in the community can go a long way toward helping schools build a positive public image. School leaders who encourage faculty, staff, and student involvement in the community and who expect maximum use of community resources in the curriculum are more successful in promoting school-community partnerships. Sharing with all school personnel the need for and value of an effective school-community relations program is an important first step. When staff members have an understanding of the short-term as well as long-term benefits of forging a strong school-community relationship, they are more likely to take an active role in accomplishing goals and objectives. Determining the annual percentage of public participation in the school and the impact that such participation has had on the school's programs and activities is strongly encouraged. This information helps school leaders recognize areas of strength, as well as needs to be addressed in a plan for community involvement.

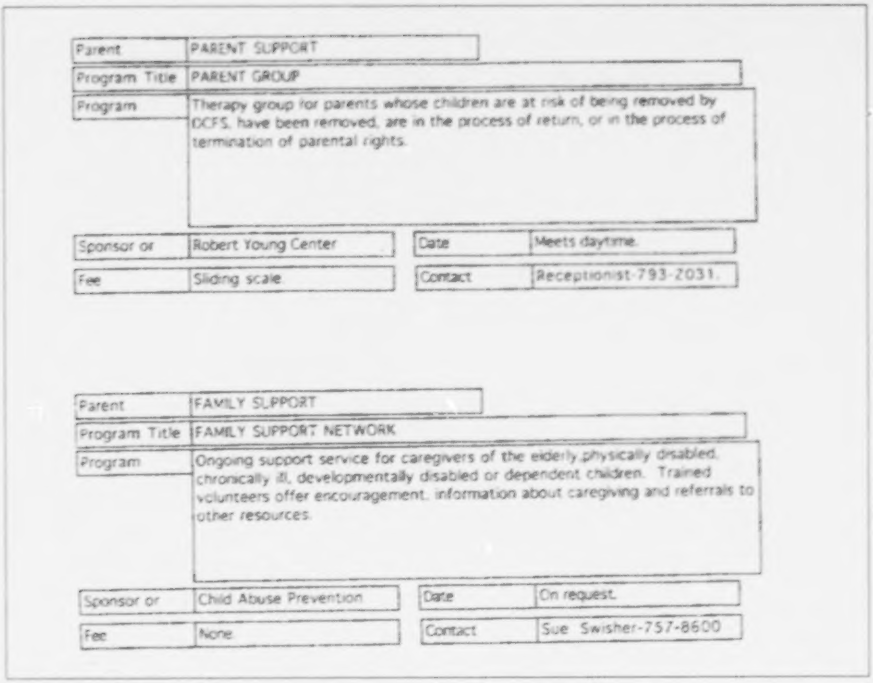
In districts where children are bussed from one community to attend school in another community, schools must first determine what they mean when they say "community." Is reference being made to the immediate area surrounding the school? Or is reference being made to the neighborhoods represented by the student body? The best answer is probably "both," since excluding either from the definition would be cutting off an important potential partner with a preexisting vested interest in the school. Also, when one considers the impact a school's image has on the voting public, it is easy to see why schools need to reach beyond their immediate neighborhood in fostering good relations.

Identification of resources in the extended community and the creation of a school database facilitates use of community agencies and outreach to various organizations, businesses, and groups. In Figure 11.1 are two entries from a database created by Cindy Teague, an early childhood special education teacher who developed a list of family resources. In Figure 11.2 is another example of a computerized database, developed by teacher Lisa Fulkerson.

Forms of community involvement. Community involvement has been defined as the "actions that organizations and individuals (e.g., parents, businesses, universities, social service agencies, and the media) take to promote student development" (Nettles 1991, 380). Community involvement has taken many forms, including partnerships such as the PUSH for Excellence project initiated by Jesse Jackson in the mid-seventies and numerous business-school partnerships; allocation of resources, such as those programs initiated by the Campbell Soup Company and IBM; and involvement in instruction through programs organized by churches and civil and service organizations.

Adopt-a-School programs have spread throughout the country since the early eighties. Adopt-a-School is a partnership between a business and one school. Pet Incorporated, a neighbor of Oakwood, has shared numerous resources with the school. In exchange, the school gratefully acknowledges the company's support by publicly recognizing its contributions. In addition to the support shown by this company, Oakwood School enjoys a good relationship with the local chamber of commerce. Knowing that they are welcome visitors in the school, representatives of the chamber frequently bring visitors into the school.

Partnership arrangements require careful planning and monitoring. According to O'Connell (1985), successful programs are characterized by defined goals, a planning committee comprised of company and school representatives, stated objectives, needs assessment, and orientation for school personnel. Four criteria were developed by the Oakland (California) School District Adopt-a-School program (O'Connell 1985). These are (1) it does not duplicate an existing program, (2) it is based on the needs of the school, (3) it fits into the learning goals and planning objectives set by the district, and (4) the company consents informally to a three-year agreement. In the Springfield (Illinois) Public Schools, the Adopt-a-School program was cosponsored by the chamber of commerce (Manning 1987). The Adopt-a-School concept was originally presented to the chief executive officers of twelve leading firms in face-to-face meetings conducted by a representative of the chamber of commerce and the district superintendent. Approximately two weeks later, the corporate officers were contacted to ascertain whether they were interested



Parent	PARENT SUPPORT		
Program Title	PARENT GROUP		
Program	Therapy group for parents whose children are at risk of being removed by DCFS, have been removed, are in the process of return, or in the process of termination of parental rights.		
Sponsor or	Robert Young Center	Date	Meets daytime.
Fee	Sliding scale.	Contact	Receptionist-793-2031.

Parent	FAMILY SUPPORT		
Program Title	FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK		
Program	Ongoing support service for caregivers of the elderly,physically disabled, chronically ill, developmentally disabled or dependent children. Trained volunteers offer encouragement, information about caregiving and referrals to other resources.		
Sponsor or	Child Abuse Prevention	Date	On request.
Fee	None.	Contact	Sue Swisher-757-8600

Figure 11.1

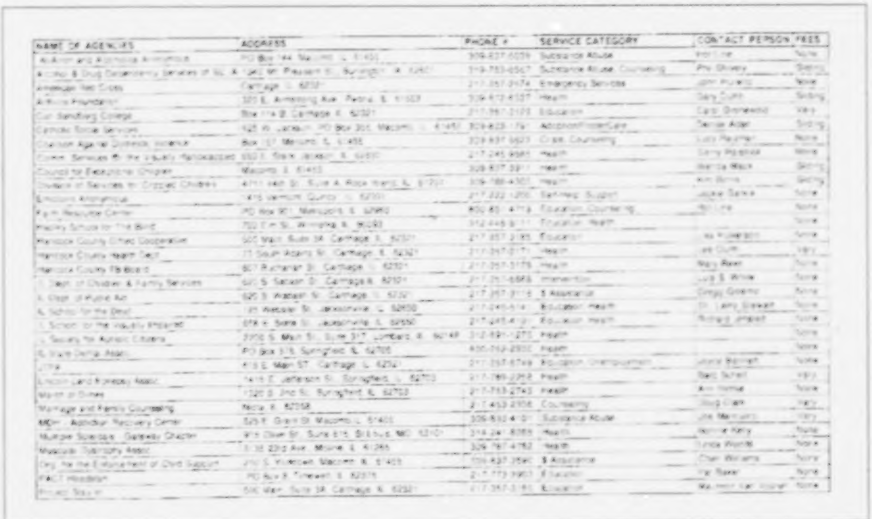


Figure 11.2

in participating in the program. Nearly all agreed to join. As word spread, other companies began to call to inquire about participation in the program. Each business and each school put together a team of interested employees to serve as liaisons to coordinate the partnership activities, with the primary pur-

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pose of making citizens more knowledgeable about what was happening in their schools. The program in the Springfield Public School System has grown with each school having between three and eight partners, depending on enrollment. Partnership activities have included collaborative fund-raising events to benefit the schools, recognition of honor students and students with perfect attendance, penpal activities between students and employees, company assistance in planting trees at the school, the development of a "Kids Beat" news broadcast prepared and presented by students and used as a part of a television station's newscast, and collaborative community service projects such as filling and delivering Christmas baskets for the needy. Individuals directly involved in the partnership program in Springfield feel that the program has helped change public attitudes about the schools by fostering a spirit of cooperation between the private and public sectors of the community. "It communicates the idea that public education is a shared responsibility. Working on a successful project fosters a "we" spirit" (Manning 1987, 41).

While structured programs such as the ones listed above do exist, they are not available to all schools. Individual school personnel must take the lead in initiating efforts designed to bring the community and the school closer together. For example, a prekindergarten teacher in an impoverished area on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Esta Borden (1987) writes about her experiences helping young children connect to the community. Over the course of the year, children established relationships with residents of a local retirement home and with proprietors of a fish store, grocery store, floral shop, bakery, pet shop, laundromat, and restaurants. They visited each location, talking with the owners and learning from the employees about their various jobs. In addition, a Halloween Parade, a Christmas Carol Stroll, and a Spring Garden Festival were organized so that children, parents, and merchants could interact in a positive way. In some communities, African-American business leaders have initiated programs to tutor or mentor African-American students—particularly male students. Providing multiple opportunities for community members to have personal contact with school children served to enrich the curriculum for children and strengthen the school-community relationship. This kind of community connection can, however, only be initiated when the administration sees the value and provides active support.

Principal Sally Sallee gave her support when first-grade teacher Amy Morris in Macomb, Illinois, proposed an Adopt-a-Classroom program (see Figure 11.3). To promote a positive relationship between the business community and the Lincoln School students, and also to increase students' reading, writing, and communication skills, area businesses volunteered to "adopt" first-grade classrooms. The children kept in contact with the business by writing monthly letters to the employer and/or employees. The business reciprocated by sending a minimum of one employee monthly to the classroom to serve as a guest reader. During the twenty- to thirty-minute visits, these visitors also shared specific information about their jobs. Some businesses also made cash dona-

Adopt-a-Classroom Program

Who: A Macomb Business Organization and a Lincoln First-Grade Classroom

What: Adopt-a-Classroom Program

When: September–May

Why: To promote a positive relationship between the business community and Lincoln School first-grade students.
To provide positive role models for our students from the business community.
To increase the reading, writing, and communication skills of the students.

How: Through the Adopt-a-Classroom Program, the business employees and classroom students will be encouraged to jointly participate in the following activities.

1. Each month a minimum of one employee or organization member will come in and read to their adopted class.
2. The class will keep in contact with their adopted business by writing to them each month.
3. If possible, upon completion of the Adopt-a-Classroom Program, we would like the classroom and their adopted business to meet by taking a field trip to or a tour of the business.

A monetary donation would also be welcomed to be used toward paperback books for the classroom library, potting soil, cotton balls, toothpicks, cereal, and other things for special activities in the classroom.

Contact Person: Amy Morris, First Grade Teacher
Lincoln School
315 N. Bonham
Macomb, IL 61455
309-833-2095

Figure 11.3

tions, which were used to purchase books and supplies for the classroom. At the end of the school year, a field trip to the business was scheduled. A variety of businesses participated in the program, including several local restaurants, a pet store, a beauty/barber shop, a record store, and the local branch of a large factory, to name a few of the many participants. Local newspaper coverage for the program was excellent, with photographs and accompanying stories that featured each participating business at least once during the year.

Teachers at Oakwood School incorporate community involvement into their collaborative planning activities conducted with the children. As teacher and children discuss plans for a unit of study, they consider ways to inform and involve the community. The children begin to think of themselves as part of the community outside of the school and, at the same time, of the community as their audience. For example, local restaurants were asked to print children's original poems and stories on their placemats. The placemats served to draw customers from the school who wanted to see the children's writings; and members of the general public saw that the school was indeed teaching the children to write. In a similar arrangement with the Oakwood Food Market, children decorated grocery sacks with an advertisement for their favorite book. Parents shopped at the store because their children wanted them to see the sacks, and the public became more aware of how the school was promoting literacy.

Education foundation partnerships. An education foundation is a form of school/business partnership that involves financial contributions from either corporations or private citizens. Although foundations have a reputation for being philanthropic, many schools have developed their own foundations. Contributions are deposited in a nonprofit account governed by a local board of trustees that functions separately from the school board. Foundations are generally organized by an internal school district committee that drafts a statement of purpose and operational guidelines. A board of trustees is appointed, articles of incorporation and bylaws are adopted, and tax-exempt status is obtained. In addition, regulations regarding membership, meetings, officers, committees, and other matters are decided (O'Connell 1985). The funds are earmarked for special projects, such as mini-grants for classroom projects, sabbaticals for teachers and administrators to engage in advanced study, and so forth. In addition to soliciting donations, fund-raising activities are generally conducted. For example, the Macomb Education Foundation in Macomb, Illinois, worked with three local grocery stores to develop a coupon booklet. The booklet, which sold in the community for $25, contained coupons for $5 off of grocery bills of $50 or more. The total value of the booklet to the purchaser was $45. Since its formation, the Macomb Educational Foundation has provided many books, science equipment, and other classroom resources, thus enriching the educational program for students.

Community service. Becoming aware of specific community needs is also important as schools seek to establish a two-way partnership where both schools and communities benefit. In some communities school facilities are open to organizations such as the Scouts and 4-H clubs that meet during after-school hours. Sometimes the gym is available in the evenings for community basketball games, joggers, and walkers. Polls are often set up in schools during elections.

Whatever the activities, supporting worthwhile community activities through provision of facilities helps build a feeling of ownership among community members who may not otherwise have reason to enter the school building.

Many schools are beginning to realize the benefits of involving students in performing acts of community service. And the general public has indicated an approval of community service as a requirement for high school graduation. A majority, seventy percent, of the respondents to the twenty-fifth Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Elam, Rose, and Gallup 1993) were in favor of requiring all students in the public schools to perform some kind of community service in order to graduate. There are many community service opportunities. Assisting local charity organizations such as the Heart Fund and Cancer Society in annual fund raisers is one way some students contribute. Other schools involve students in environmental work such as neighborhood clean-ups and recycling drives. In Salt Lake City, Utah, fourth- through sixth-grade students in Barbara Lewis's classes have planted hundreds of trees, cleaned up a hazardous waste site, and worked for the passage of two new environmental laws (Nathan and Kielsmeier 1991).

Community characteristics impacting on involvement. Consideration of certain community characteristics is important in determining a course of action. Researcher Saundra Nettles (1991) proposes a conceptual framework that may be useful to schools in analyzing their communities. Consideration of four aspects of Nettle's work, *community competence, community structure, community climate*, and *community processes*, may prove helpful as schools contemplate various types of community involvement. *Community competence* refers to the capacity of the community and community members to solve problems and meet demands of life. A well-functioning community—in terms of responsiveness to the diverse needs of its members, wise use of resources, cohesiveness, and collective sense of well-being and physical security—is more likely to see the school as central to the well-being of the community, and more likely to accept its role as a responsible partner with the school. *Community structure* refers to the community's physical characteristics, history, and availability of a variety of social and other resources. Research indicates that community history and the level of resources shape the form and direction of involvement with the school (Nettles 1991). Similarly, *community climate* or *culture*—that is, the values, standards, and rules that serve to maintain community order and control—have a large impact on involvement. Some researchers suggest that climate is an important influence on efforts to mobilize support for school improvement (Kumi, Thompkins, Allen, and Murray 1979). Finally, *community processes* refers to the procedures through which the community engages in problem solving, decision making, and allocation of resources (Hurley, Barbarin, and Mitchell 1981). Different types of community involvement are likely to have different effects and meet with different results in different communities. Recognizing various community characteristics and their effects on involvement is important for school leaders who, at the same time, recognize the need for a three-way partnership of school, parents, and community.

SUMMARY

As stated by Edwards and Young (1992), "Boundaries separating the responsibilities of home, school, and community are blurring, calling into question the traditional conceptions of parent involvement as one-to-one relationship between parent and teacher" (78). If schools are to continue to accept the challenge of "education for all," they will need broader support from society-at-large. However, garnering this support is difficult in the face of critics who disregard current social milieu and equate the poor school performance of some students with poor schools. Terrel H. Bell, former Education Secretary who appointed the National Commission on Excellence in Education, stated: "The cataclysmic change in the quality of students' lives outside of school and the steady erosion of parental support and community interest in education [have] made it almost impossible for schools to succeed" (595). Bell believes that people need to rally around their schools rather than blame them. School leaders must work to develop and implement strong plans for fostering public relations and building community ties before the support that is so badly needed can be realized.

The questions listed below are designed to help you think about your school's position with respect to community involvement and the need for increased public relations.

For your consideration . . .

1. A school's reputation in the community is important.
   Yes/No
2. Community members should know about and be involved with their local schools.
   Yes/No
3. Schools should portray a positive image to the public.
   Yes/No
4. Community agencies, organizations, and individuals have much to offer the school curriculum.
   Yes/No
5. The school has a responsibility to serve the community through various projects and activities.
   Yes/No
6. The school should have a regular plan for sharing with their public the good things that are happening.
   Yes/No
7. Fostering public relations should be a continuous, ongoing activity.
   Yes/No

8. Whenever possible, the school should open its doors to the community.
   Yes/No

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Chapter 12

Empowering Parents to Serve as Advocates for the Education of Their Children

A note from Elizabeth . . .
Oakwood parents are invited each year to be part of an advisory team that spends a day talking and planning with the principal and superintendent on any issue they, as parents, want to discuss. Issues ranging from curriculum to traffic safety, to building and playground maintenance, to a vision for the future, have all been discussed at these meetings. Parents appreciate the opportunity to be involved and know their input is valued, because many times they can see actions taking place that they recommended.

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education made several recommendations for improving America's public, private, and parochial schools. The commission challenged all Americans to make education a national priority. In addition, there was a challenge to parents, children's first and most influential teachers. In essence, the commission asserted that each child's ideas about education and its significance begin with the parents. Further, the commission challenged parents to be living examples of what they expected their children to honor and emulate. Following are some of the recommendations for parents made by the National Commission.

- Help children become well educated in the use of language, science, and math;
- Help children have respect for intelligence, achievement, and learning;
- Help children develop skills in goal setting and disciplined work;
- Help children be intolerant of the shoddy, the second-rate, and "good enough";
- Help children develop curiosity, creativity, and confidence.

To help children fulfill these goals, parents must participate actively in their children's education by encouraging good study habits, monitoring homework, and exhibiting a commitment to continued learning in their own lives. Additionally, parents must be active participants in the work of the school.

Throughout this book we have offered strategies for inviting parents to be active participants in their children's education. We have discussed involving parents in setting goals for their children's learning and in the assessment of that learning, maintaining consistent communication between home and school, providing opportunities for parents to volunteer their services, and helping parents to become better teachers of their children. In this chapter we discuss the involvement of parents in decision-making activities that impact on their children's education. Extending the partnership arrangement to include participation in a range of decision-making issues requires that the relationship be built on cooperation, trust, and mutual respect. In schools where such a relationship does not yet exist, school leaders would be wise first to work to enhance the partnership relationship through strategies designed to increase two-way communication. Through a shared exchange of feelings, information, and ideas, both parents and school personnel will, undoubtedly, identify issues that need to be addressed. Then, by bringing together members of each group to work collaboratively in the development of recommendations for improvement, the school will have begun to empower parents as decision makers and as advocates.

Developing "Family-like Schools"

Although parents and teachers share the responsibility for educating children, each performs some functions independently of the other. Decision making has traditionally been within the purview of the schools, and parents' attempts to participate or influence the outcome has been viewed as "interference." The exclusion of parents from decision-making activities is representative of a model that Epstein (1990) calls "a division of labor that pulls the spheres of school and family influences and responsibilities apart, decreasing overlap and restricting interactions between parents and teachers" (104). In contrast, Epstein advocates a "combination of labor that pushes the spheres of family and school influence together," resulting in what she calls "school-like families" and "family-like schools" (104). Employing the strategies presented in previous chapters results in the creation of school-like families as teachers enlist parents as partners in their children's education. Family-like schools result from attention being paid to each student's family life, self-concept, aspirations, social skills, and talents. Schools can empower parents to assist them in making decisions that further a family-like school model. The parent advisory team that meets with the Oakwood principal and district superintendent is an example of one way to further this model.

Accepting Parents as Part of the Decision-Making Team

To paraphrase something John Dewey once said, the school should ensure that what the wisest parents in the community want for their children is what all children receive. In virtually every school there are parents who are well-equipped to participate in making decisions that will affect the educational experience for all children. Developing a forum for parents and teachers to ask questions and share concerns about the school and to take part in the solution-finding process is one way of tapping the expertise that is sure to exist. As the reform efforts occurring in schools all across the country grow, so do the number of "stories" about the support—or lack of support—from parents. School districts are beginning to learn that parents can thwart or slow down the whole process if what the school is doing is not clearly understood.

Increasingly, parents are becoming more involved in the planning and implementation stages of school reform efforts. States involved in new accreditation procedures and reform efforts specify that parents must be represented on the Site Council that is established at all schools. These parents are to serve as a liaison to the community and are also to offer suggestions on what they see needs improving. In addition, all parents are part of the population that is surveyed to determine perceived strengths and weaknesses of a district. Parental input is vital in order for schools to have the support they need for critical issues such as tax initiatives, curriculum reform, redistricting, and consolidation. Empowered parents will make their voices heard; educators who listen make the partnership stronger.

In order to get the results schools want, school leaders must work with decision-making groups to ensure that they understand what results are desired (Brandt 1993). This understanding must come *before* decisions are made. In addition, decision makers should be able to articulate how the results will be recognized, documented, and evaluated. Setting some ground rules and expectations for decision-making groups can help alleviate misunderstandings and increase the effectiveness of their work. School personnel understand the chain of command. They know that, for example, even when site-based management exists, the superintendent and ultimately the school board is responsible for ensuring that the decisions made will have a positive outcome. Just as the district superintendent and the school board have a right to accept or reject recommendations from local schools and to overturn decisions made at a classroom or school level, so too the building principal has the right and the responsibility to review carefully each recommendation, accepting only those he or she feels are truly in the best interests of those concerned.

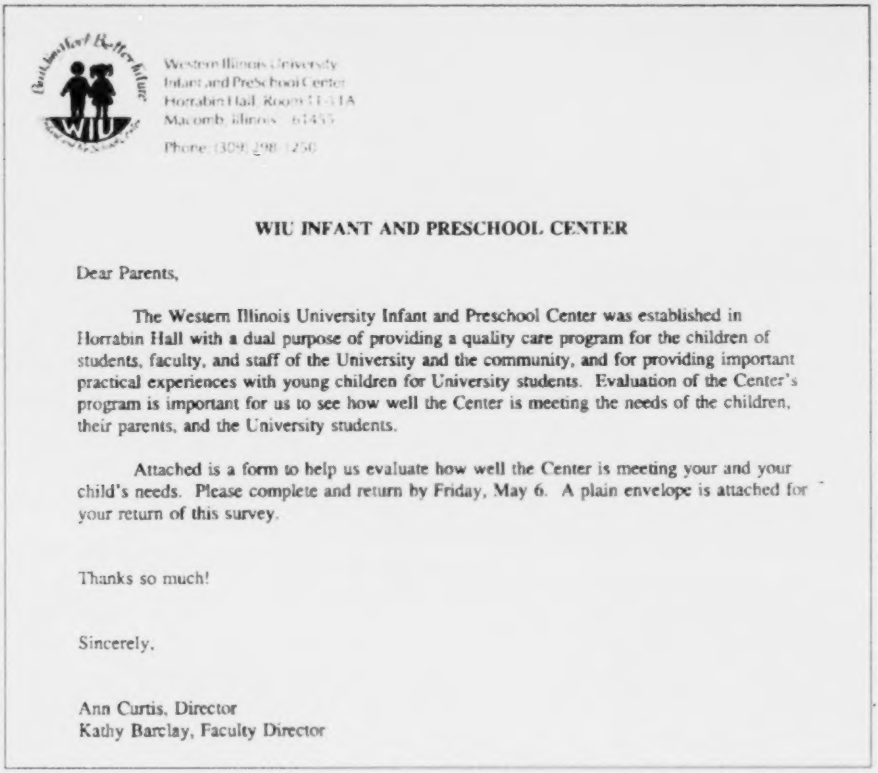
Many educators fear parent involvement in decision making because of experiences they have had with rude—and even hostile—parents who tried to force their opinions and ideas on the school. While parents like these do exist, there are also many thoughtful, cooperative parents who are interested in the well-being of all children in the system. The temptation is to offer committee appointment to only those parents who hold views similar to those held by school personnel. However, this approach often serves to further alienate and anger groups of parents who have different ideas. It is generally better to have those individuals with markedly dissimilar views on the inside working for solutions to problems, rather than to have them on the outside working against solutions. Also, we all know of individuals who are regarded as "difficult to get along with" and "hard to please." Sometimes this characterization is true; however, it is also true that sometimes these individuals are "detail" people. They refuse to "go along"—to offer their support of a solution—until they have exhausted every detail. Often tireless in their efforts and relentless in their role of "devil's advocate," these individuals tend to alienate themselves from the other committee members. Again, while it is very tempting *not* to invite these types of individuals to be members of committees, more harm usually comes when they are refused membership. When they are "on the inside," so to speak, they have a responsibility to support the decisions and recommendations that eventually come from the committee as a whole. This responsibility needs to be made clear to all members of the committee *before* the work is begun. Each member of the committee should have ample opportunity to share his or her own ideas, as well as any supporting evidence. Once this has taken place, the democratic process must proceed with majority opinion ruling. The recommendations that go forward from any committee would, of necessity, be the recommendation from the entire group. For an individual committee member, at this point, to continue to push his or her own convictions would be entirely inappropriate. Such an individual would risk disassociation from the decision-making group.

Involving Parents in Schoolwide Evaluation

As consumers of the education system, parents should be involved in evaluation efforts designed to provide constructive criticism for improving the school's programs. While many schools are required to share with parents results of various evaluation instruments and surveys, few districts routinely include parents in the evaluation and accountability process. Each year parents should have an opportunity to respond to surveys in which they are asked to rate the effectiveness of their child's educational experiences. The school as a whole, and specific services and programs provided by the school, should be included. For example, parents should be asked to evaluate specific aspects of the curriculum, as well as any special reading and math programs in which their child participated. Figure 12.1 shows an example of an evaluation instrument that parents of children enrolled in the Western Illinois University Infant and Preschool Center were asked to complete.

Written surveys can either be sent home with the students or mailed. The survey may also appear in a special edition of the school newsletter. Another option is for the parent-teacher organization to conduct a telephone survey designed to determine parent satisfaction with the school. A combination of methods may be used in an attempt to gather input from as many parents as possible. After the results are compiled, a summary should be presented to parents via the school newsletter or a presentation at a meeting of the parent-teacher organization.

In the Jacksonville, Illinois, public school system, a thirty-one-member strategic planning team composed of representatives from the community and



Western Illinois University
Infant and PreSchool Center
Horrabin Hall, Room 11-11A
Macomb, Illinois 61455

Phone (309) 298-1250

WIU INFANT AND PRESCHOOL CENTER

Dear Parents,

The Western Illinois University Infant and Preschool Center was established in Horrabin Hall with a dual purpose of providing a quality care program for the children of students, faculty, and staff of the University and the community, and for providing important practical experiences with young children for University students. Evaluation of the Center's program is important for us to see how well the Center is meeting the needs of the children, their parents, and the University students.

Attached is a form to help us evaluate how well the Center is meeting your and your child's needs. Please complete and return by Friday, May 6. A plain envelope is attached for your return of this survey.

Thanks so much!

Sincerely,

Ann Curtis, Director
Kathy Barclay, Faculty Director

Figure 12.1

the school district met nearly thirty hours to discuss concerns they felt would affect Jacksonville schools in the future. The team developed a list of ten broad objectives to be addressed by the system. The objectives included: (1) achieving financial stability, (2) creating a more effective and efficient organizational structure for use of the facilities, resources, and staff, (3) supporting ongoing recruitment, retention, and development of a highly effective staff, (4) developing a curriculum that builds on the present and focuses on the future, (5) developing student responsibility and accountability, (6) investigating and implementing alternative approaches to ensure success for at-risk students, (7) establishing education partnerships between the schools and the community, (8) investigating models of shared decision making, (9) utilizing technology effectively in the schools, and (10) providing adequate facilities that are clean, safe, and attractive. These ten objectives were presented to the school board, which appointed two hundred volunteers to serve on ten committees comprised of fifteen to twenty members each. Half the volunteers represented the community, and half represented the school system. Committees worked approximately four months to research the objectives and develop recommendations for the board. Having been involved in each phase of the long-range strategic planning process, community members who served on the commit-

Parent Evaluation of Western Illinois University Preschool Center

Name (Optional) ____________________

General Planning	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
A. Does the arrangement of the physical facilities promote a climate conducive to meeting children's needs in:			
1. Rest time?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
2. Nutrition site (kitchen facility)?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
3. Play space (indoors)?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
4. Play space (outdoors)?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
5. A balance of active and quiet activities (i.e., gym, creative activities, puzzles, stories, etc.)?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
6. Promote the overall development of the individual child in creative and innovative programs?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
B. Is the space and equipment effectively arranged to:			
1. Allow for children to move freely from area to area (i.e., arrival, departure, drinking, resting, etc.)?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
2. Promote the development of independent and responsible work habits?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
C. Provide an aesthetic and creative environment with:			
1. Bulletin board?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
2. Wall displays?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3
3. Mobiles?			
Comment ____________	1	2	3

Figure 12.1 (continued)

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
4. Room colors and a variety of textures? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
D. Does the infant/preschool teacher(s) interact with you the parent by:			
1. Speaking in terms that can be understood? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
2. Answering any questions or concerns that may arise regarding children, family, or home? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
3. Providing general information regarding growth and development of children? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
4. Asking about your concerns and ideas? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
5. Listening to any recommendation or suggestions that may be offered? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
6. Listening to parents attentively? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
7. Demonstrating a positive attitude toward you and your child/children? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
8. Arranging personal conferences with additional resource personnel (i.e., physicians, counselors, social workers)? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
9. Providing a warm and friendly atmosphere for discussions and conferences? Comment ______________________	1	2	3
E. Are the hours of operation sufficient to meet the flexibility and hours of parents' needs? Comment ______________________	1	2	3

Other Comments ______________________________________

____

____

Figure 12.1 (continued)

tee gained a sense of ownership for the recommendations submitted, as well as for the school system. Working collaboratively during the planning process also smoothed the way for implementation of suggestions for improvement.

A number of parents of children enrolled in the Juchem Elementary School in Broomfield, Colorado, have worked with the school principal and staff members to develop the FOCUS (Friendly Observations Can Unify a School) project (Meadows 1993). This project is an outgrowth of what started out to be a negative occurrence when angry parents showed up, videocamera in hand, to prove that the supervision of the school's playground was poor. The principal, B. J. Meadows, began to consider positive ways to involve parents as observers. Each school in the Jefferson County School District has its own local accountability committee composed of parents, community members, teachers, and the principal. The primary purpose of this committee is to help identify a school's direction and report its progress to the community and the school district. Meadows asked this committee to appoint parent observers for the new project, which would have as its goal the assessment of students' self-esteem through classroom observations of student behaviors. Members of the FOCUS team included the principal, two parent observers, and two teachers. This group worked to develop a training guide, an observation outline, goals, objectives, and detailed operating agreements for the observations. Approximately two-thirds of the classrooms were observed, as teachers were allowed the option of not having their classroom observed. Commenting on outcomes of the project, Meadows stated (34) that

> the process has brought parents and staff members closer together. We treat one another with respect, communicate openly, and have a better understanding of how current educational practices affect student learning. The parent observations are giving us a clearer picture of what we need to continue doing well and what we need to improve. From this picture, both parents and teachers have a better understanding of the complexity of education.

SUMMARY

"Oakwood School . . . *your* public school" and other similar slogans have been adopted by numerous schools across the nation. The intent is to convey to parents and members of the community that the school belongs to them—that they have a responsibility to ensure its success. Yet schools must also realize that ownership and responsibility cannot exist without power. For these individuals to view public education as a shared responsibility, they must be empowered as contributors to decision-making processes. In this chapter we have described a number of strategies for involving parents in decision-making activities. As in any partnership arrangement, with empowerment comes responsibility. Educators, parents, and community members must work collaboratively to enrich the educational process by contributing wholeheartedly to efforts aimed at identifying what's working—and what's not—and to taking an active role in seeking solutions that will work for all children.

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Chapter 13

Building a Comprehensive Plan for Family and Community Involvement

We can say we recognize that all parents are a significant force in their child's education and that we must tap the resources of both home and community. But just *saying* these things won't make a difference! We must believe them and commit ourselves to the development of a comprehensive plan for family and community involvement. Throughout this book we have shared with you a philosophy built on a commitment to forging partnerships with homes and with communities. Research indicating the effects on student achievement and motivation as well as on parent and community support for schools has also been shared, as has a frank discussion of the many barriers to building partnerships with all families. Numerous practical strategies for developing strong partnerships, including the creation of effective school handbooks and newsletters, and strategies for parent conferencing, parent education, volunteerism, community involvement, and public relations, have also been described. In this chapter we will provide suggestions for putting all of these components together in an organized, structured fashion atypical of the "piecemeal" approaches that characterize many parent and community involvement efforts.

Planning for Family and Community Involvement

The key ingredient for overcoming barriers and building strong partnerships with every family is *commitment*. As stated in an earlier chapter, commitment for family and community involvement must be established at the highest administrative level for the greatest benefits to be derived. Simply stated, the district superintendent and the members of the school board need to understand and support schools' efforts for building strong partnerships with families and communities. At the school level a dedicated, knowledgeable principal needs to lead the way by working to build understanding and commitment among all school personnel. Finally, teachers and other school personnel must realize the benefits to be gained through parent and community involvement and must be steadfast in their beliefs that their efforts will make a difference.

The appointment of school-level committees charged with the task of developing comprehensive plans for family and community involvement sends a clear message about the district's commitment. Each school-level committee would be comprised of school personnel, parents, and members of the community who have agreed to provide the necessary leadership for planning the program. This group would assess current strengths and weaknesses in the areas of parent-community involvement, analyze needs and study options, then develop general goals, objectives, and strategies for achievement of these within a realistic time frame. Both long-range and yearly action plans would be constructed. After approval from the faculty-at-large, the members of the planning committee would assist in the implementation and ongoing evaluation of the plan.

Goals and objectives would be derived from surveys conducted with parents, community members, teachers, and students. Information about current efforts, strengths, and perceived needs in home-school communication, parent education, volunteerism, community involvement, and public relations would be gathered. Assessment activities would also include a determination of parents who are *not* currently involved and possible reasons why. In addition, assessing the school's climate—physical characteristics that promote or inhibit parent and community involvement—is recommended. Authors Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms have developed a very effective instrument for use in this assessment process (see Figure 13.1, pages 219–28). This tool is comprised of four checklists designed to help schools identify the strengths and needs of each of the following: (1) key characteristics of the school, (2) key characteristics of families in the school, (3) the family-school relationship, and (4) the parent-teacher relationship. From these assessment data, a long-range plan to be implemented within the next three to five years would be developed along with short-range yearly action plans. Once these plans were designed, they would be reviewed, accepted, or revised for acceptance by the faculty as a whole.

One school identified as a goal making the physical environment more conducive to family and community involvement. Providing a "You Are Here" directory just inside the building, signs directing parents and community members to doors they should enter, and the availability of at least one extra adult-sized chair in each classroom were among the specific action steps accomplished.

Goals and objectives relating to home-school communication might include revising the parent handbook, developing school or classroom newsletters, and/or implementing new procedures for parent conferencing. Specific action steps and a timeline for accomplishing each would also be designed. For example, the overall goal related to home-school communication might be "to maintain regular contact with each child's family," with one specific objective being "to disseminate a school newsletter." Action steps for achieving this objective might include the purchase of a computer software program for creating newsletters, design of a masthead for the newsletter, translating the newsletter into the major languages spoken at home, methods for delivering the newsletter to various locations within the community, and plans for evaluating the effectiveness of the newsletter.

An action plan for achieving the goal "providing opportunities for parents to learn strategies for being more effective teachers of their children" might include the establishment of a parent resource library with books, brochures, booklets, and videotapes. Offering a series of parent workshops and developing home-learning activities are other activities that could be included.

With respect to volunteerism, the goal might be "establish an ongoing procedure for recruiting, training, and using volunteers." Several objectives, such as "appoint a volunteer liaison from the faculty and secure the services of a community member to serve as the coordinator of volunteers," "survey school and classroom needs," "survey interests and willingness of potential volunteers," and "recruit and train volunteers" could be established to aid in the systematic achievement of this goal. Steps leading to the accomplishment of each objective would be developed. For the objective "recruit and train volunteers," steps such as "write job descriptions for volunteers," "contact representatives of various social, civic, professional, and religious organizations," and "develop a volunteer handbook" may be among those included. Figure 13.2 (pages 229 and 230) is one school's plan for recruiting, training, and using volunteers. In addition to activities for achieving this objective, the plan lists the person responsible, date, and how each activity will be evaluated or documented.

Another major goal might be to "increase public awareness of the school and its programs." Objectives relating to this goal could involve frequent dissemination of information related to the school and its programs. "Appointing a school media contact person," "writing biweekly news releases," "dissemination of the school newsletter within the community," and "hosting Open Houses for various community organizations and groups" are samples of action steps designed to accomplish this objective.

Educators must develop plans to forge strong and lasting relationships with each child's family and with the community-at-large if the benefits inherent in a joint effort are to become a reality. Such plans need to reflect a broad perspective on family and community involvement and should encompass goals, objectives, action steps, and timelines for increasing home-school communication, helping parents become better teachers of their children, encouraging volunteer support of school programs and activities, and increasing public awareness of and involvement in the schools.

SUMMARY

Our schools are among the most central and important institutions in America; yet how often do we, as educators, find ourselves without the active support of not only the parents but also the members of our community? In order for our schools to be really successful, entire school staffs need to demonstrate an active commitment to a partnership philosophy. Research findings to date support a joint effort of parents, teachers, students, and the community to increase the effectiveness of the educational program. In addition, according to the results of the twenty-fifth Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll (Elam, Rose, and Gallup 1993), agreement exists as to the importance of parent involvement. There was "almost total unanimity in every demographic group on the importance of encouraging parent involvement" (149). In response to the question "How important do you think it is to encourage parents to take a more active role in educating their children—very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?", ninety-six percent of the public answered "very important."

At the end of each chapter, we have provided a brief set of questions designed to help you consider your own beliefs with respect to the main points included in that chapter. The answers you gave to those questions should serve as an indication of your philosophy about family and community involvement. Whether or not your school has demonstrated a past commitment to a home-school-community partnership, if you answered "yes" to a majority of the questions, your philosophy is supportive of the involvement of families and community. With the strategies presented in this book, educators who possess such a philosophy can begin to put their beliefs into action. By assessing the school's current efforts in home-school communication, parent education, volunteerism, and public relations, teachers, administrators, and other committed individuals can begin to identify areas deserving of attention. Recognizing that a comprehensive program for parent and community involvement cannot be built all at once, these individuals can lead in the development of a plan for systematically addressing each area of need.

The implementation of a comprehensive plan that incorporates goals and objectives for all major areas of parent and community involvement—communication, education, volunteerism, and public relations—*will* bring your system, your school, and your students much valuable support. Once your school has experienced the active support that is made possible through the creation of strong home-school-community partnerships, you will be forever committed to providing the ongoing support that is necessary for the successful continuation of any worthwhile relationship. After all, what relationship could be more important to our schools and to our students than a healthy, positive relationship with our families and our community?

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Taking Stock: Checklists for Self-Assessment

Checklist #1: Key Characteristics of Your School

The appearance of your school, the neighborhood it is in, and the relations your staff has with the community all have an important effect on your school's relationship with families.

This checklist is designed to help you to assess your school's assets and liabilities. For each category, we have added an "Other." Use this space to add things we might have missed. Some of the things on this checklist you can change; others you cannot. For the really tough ones, enlist the help of your parents and community. (One school we know of had a leaky roof for years. The principle had tried in vain to get the funds to have it repaired. Finally, he invited parents to come and take pictures of the buckets on the floor, full of water from the dripping ceiling. After the pictures were sent to the local newspaper, the roof was fixed.)

Flag your problem areas by filling in the boxes following categories in which you find a lot of negative answers. The checklists that follow, based on the principles of partnership schools, will give you ideas on how to overcome your liabilities.

A. Physical characteristics of your school:

(Answer "yes" or "no")
_______ Does it look well kept?
_______ Is there an obvious entranceway?
_______ Are the grounds well tended?
_______ Is there a place for parents to park at night when they visit the school?
_______ Is the playground/recreation area well equipped and safe?
_______ Is there a library?
_______ Is there an adequate lunchroom?
Other ____
_______ *Is this a problem area for you? If so, answer yes here.*

B. Location of your school:

(Answer "yes" or "no")
_______ Do most of your families work within thirty minutes (by car) of the school?
_______ Do most of your families live within ten minutes (by car) of the school?
_______ Is there adequate public transportation to and from the school?
_______ Do parents and teachers feel safe in the area around the school?
Other ____
_______ *Is this a problem area for you? If so, answer yes here.*

Figure 13.1

C. Relations of the school with the community:

(Answer "yes" or "no")

______ Does your staff tend to have the same ethnic and social background as the families in your school?

______ Do you consider the turnover rate of your staff high?

______ Has there been more than one principal in the last five years?

______ Do most of your children live in the immediate neighborhood?

______ Have there been any significant political battles about the school in recent years?

Other ______________________________

______ *Is this a problem area for you? If so, answer yes here.*

D. The school facility as a resource to the community:

(Answer "yes" or "no")

______ Is it open after school hours for visits or meetings?

______ Is there a community playground on the school grounds?

______ Is it available and used for community events or community education?

______ Is it a polling place on election day?

______ Does the school sponsor events for the community?

______ Does it provide space for daycare or after-school care?

______ Are school resources and equipment available for community use (e.g., sports equipment, gymnasium, costumes, laboratories)?

Other ______________________________

______ *Is this a problem area for you? If so, answer yes here.*

E. The school's reputation in the community:

(Answer "yes" or "no")

______ Is it known for a strong academic program?

______ Is it generally thought of as a "good" school?

______ Is it free from chronic discipline problems and vandalism?

______ Do many of the families in your attendance area use private or parochial schools?

______ Does it offer a variety of nonacademic and extracurricular programs, both during and after school?

Other ______________________________

______ *Is this a problem area for you? If so, answer yes here.*

F. Special features for which the school is known:

(Check any that apply)

______ Team teaching

______ Open classrooms

______ Tracking by ability or performance

______ Smaller schools within the school

***Figure 13.1** (continued)*

_______ Special and compensatory education programs

_______ Magnet programs

_______ Other strong programs (drama, music, sports, arts, etc.)

Other ____

_______ *Is this a problem area for you? If so, answer yes here.*

Checklist #2: Key Characteristics of Families in Your School

While a school is not a social service agency, it is still important to know the varying situations of the different families of your school.

This checklist is designed to help you identify special characteristics of your school's families and to alert you to issues that may need priority consideration and attention. If the data are not available from registration cards or surveys, try an educated guess. (We recommend that you do NOT ask your students for this information.)

Once you have identified the special needs of your families, the following checklists should give you some ideas about how, or whether, to address them.

A. What proportion of students come from:

(Estimate %)

_______ Single-parent households

_______ Two-parent households

_______ Foster homes or institutions

_______ Nonparent households (relatives or guardians)

B. What proportion of children have ever experienced a serious disruption (separation, divorce, or death) in the family:

(Estimate %)

_______ Less than twenty-five percent

_______ About half

_______ The great majority

C. What is the economic/educational status of the families?

(Estimate %)

_______ Proportion below poverty level (or eligible for free lunch program)

_______ Proportion with at least one college-educated parent

_______ Proportion owning at least one automobile

_______ Proportion with telephone at home

_______ Proportion that have undergone serious economic stress within the last two years

***Figure 13.1** (continued)*

D. What is the racial/cultural background of the families?

______ Proportion of racial minorities (Estimate %)

______ Number of different languages spoken by parents (and identify which ones)

______ Proportion from cultural or religious minorities to which school should be sensitive (diet, holidays, medical issues, etc.) (Estimate %)

E. What proportion of children live in families where both parents, or the custodial parent, is employed outside the home for most of the school day?

(Check one)

______ Less than twenty-five percent

______ About half

______ The great majority

F. How many children are left unsupervised for long periods before or after school?

(Check one)

______ Less than twenty-five percent

______ About half

______ The great majority

G. What proportion of families is new to the community this year?

(Check one)

______ Less than twenty-five percent

______ About half

______ The great majority

H. What proportion of children is handicapped or in need of special education?

(Check one)

______ Less than ten percent

______ Less than twenty-five percent

______ About half

How much of this information do you routinely collect? If you have not been able to answer these questions fairly easily, you may want to re-think how you collect data on your students and their families. If you use surveys or registration cards, some of the more sensitive questions may need to be made optional.

Have any of your findings surprised you? If so, you may want to consider whether they indicate a special need that is not being dealt with adequately.

The next two lists are derived from basic principles for a partnership school. They are diagnostic devices, with questions to clue you in on how well your school is working with parents. We do not mean to be exhaustive or definitive but to provide a fair sampling of practices under each principle.

We hope that a school principal, teachers, or school team will use this to assess the areas where the school is (or is not) working with parents and to obtain ideas

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***Figure 13.1** (continued)*

about what else can be done. To cover topics we may have missed, or that you have thought of and we have not, we have added an "Other" response at the end of each section.

We also hope that the principal will use this devise to compare his or her perceptions with those of the staff and parents to get a full picture of how the school is working with parents.

Look for areas of commonality and disagreement between the school and parents, or between the principal and teachers. On a separate page make a list of the areas you all agree need work.

Checklist #3: Assessing the Family-School Relationship

Principle #1: School Climate

(Answer "yes" or "no")

_______ Do office personnel greet parents (in person or on the phone) in a friendly, courteous way?

_______ Do posted signs warmly welcome parents and visitors?

_______ Are there directions (written or posted) for parents and visitors to find their way around the school?

_______ Is there a comfortable reception area for parents and visitors, equipped with a coatrack and information about the school?

_______ Is there an orientation program for the incoming class of students and their families?

_______ Is there a program for helping midyear transfer students and their families to settle in school? (For example, is a staff member assigned to be their "host"?)

_______ Are there regular social occasions or events where parents and school staff can get to know each other?

_______ Does the principal have clearly posted office hours when parents and students can drop in to talk?

_______ Does the school permit parents to observe in class?

_______ Does the school have an "Open Door" policy, where parents are welcome at any time during the school day?

Other ____

Principle #2: Communication

(Answer "yes" or "no")

_______ Is there a school newsletter with up-to-date information about holidays, special events, etc.?

_______ Does the school send home a calendar listing dates of parent-teacher conferences, report cards, holiday schedules, and major events?

_______ Does the school send home a directory of key PTA representatives and school personnel, with phone numbers?

_______ Does the school hold annual back-to-school nights/open houses?

Figure 13.1 (continued)

______ Does the school have a hot line for parents and students to deal with emergencies, rumors, and other "burning questions"?

______ Do your policies encourage all teachers to communicate frequently with parents about their curriculum plans, expectations for homework, grading policies, and how they should help?

______ Do parents know where to go with their concerns, questions, and complaints?

______ Does the principal review all the school's written communications, including report card format and how test results are reported, to make sure they are respectful of a parent's adult status and yet easy to understand?

______ Are parents informed of their rights? (This includes access to school records, due process in disciplinary actions, and participation in special education decisions.)

Other ______________________________

Principle #3: Parents as Collaborators and Problem Solvers

(Answer "yes" or "no")

______ Does the school require at least one parent/teacher conference each year for each student?

______ Does the school offer to set up teacher-parent conferences upon request?

______ Does the school provide in-service training or other opportunities to help teachers communicate and collaborate with parents?

______ Is there an early warning policy where teachers consult with parents promptly if a child is falling behind or having social behavior problems?

______ Does the school inform parents right away if a student doesn't show up for school? Are parents promptly consulted if there is a pattern of unexcused absences? (A "yes" to both parts of the question qualifies as a "yes" answer.)

______ does the elementary school confer with parents on the choice of classroom settings and /or teacher?

______ Does the high school require parent approval on a student's choice of courses?

______ Are training and resources (such as a parent advocate) provided for parents of special education students to help them participate in the Individualized Education Plan and other processes?

Other ______________________________

Principle #4: Parents as Advisors and Decision Makers

(Answer "yes" or "no")

______ Does the school publish and keep current a policy handbook for parents and students that covers discipline, absences, homework, dress standards, parent and student rights, etc.?

______ If the school needs to develop a new policy or program, is there a mechanism for obtaining parent input?

Figure 13.1 *(continued)*

_______ Is there a parent-teacher organization that meets at least once a month?

_______ Do parents ever approach the principal on their own initiative to question general school policy or procedures, aside from situations that affect only their child?

_______ When a problem arises at the school, such as a sharp increase in vandalism or drug use or a significant decline in test scores, does the staff inform and enlist the help of parents immediately?

_______ Are there established procedures for dealing with parents' demands, especially those of a vocal minority?

Other ____

Principle #5: Outreach to All Families

(Answer "yes" or "no")

_______ Is there a policy for informing noncustodial parents about their children's performance and school events?

_______ Do teachers sometimes meet outside school hours with parents who have jobs and cannot easily get away during the working day?

_______ Does the school hold evening and weekend events for its families so that employed parents (mothers, fathers, others) can come to see the school?

_______ If there is a substantial minority language population at the school, are written communications provided in that language?

_______ Is there in-service training offered for teachers on how to deal with problems caused by divorce or separation, such as how to avoid being caught between warring parents, or the impact of family breakup on children?

_______ Are there any special programs, such as peer-group discussions, for students whose parents are separating, divorced, or deceased?

_______ Is there an outreach program for parents—especially minority groups—who do not participate at all in school events, e.g., where faculty or parent volunteers are willing to make home visits or attend church meetings to answer questions, allay fears, and explain the importance of being involved in their children's education?

_______ When a particular parent refuses to cooperate with the principal or teacher, is there a school staff member trained to intervene and work with that parent?

Other ____

Principle #6: Promoting a Philosophy of Partnership

(Answer "yes" or "no")

_______ Does the school have a written statement about partnership with parents that is clearly available, especially in all written publications?

_______ Are there in-service opportunities for training teachers to work with parents?

_______ Is time at staff meetings devoted to discussing working with parents and to reinforce teachers' efforts with parents?

***Figure 13.1** (continued)*

______ Are teachers encouraged to consult with the principal if they are having difficulty dealing with a parent?

______ Does the principal offer to sit in at meetings with teachers and parents or to mediate any dispute between them?

______ Does the principal substitute in the classroom or make substitutes available to allow teachers and other staff to have meetings with parents?

______ Does the school offer assistance to help parents with babysitting, transportation, or other logistical difficulties, so that they may attend school events?

______ Are space, resources, and staff support (e.g., reasonable access to copying machine, typing services, a desk) provided for parents' school-related activities?

Other ______________________________

Principle #7: Volunteer Participation

(Answer "yes" or "no")

______ Does the school have an organized volunteer program with a coordinator (paid or volunteer)?

______ Does the program draw from retired people, the business community, local citizens, and students, as well as parents?

______ Is there a wide variety of jobs available for volunteers, including ones that could be done at home or on weekends?

______ Are all parents expected to volunteer in some way during the school year?

______ Is the program reassessed periodically, with the participation of parents, teachers, and other volunteers to ensure that the program is meeting school needs effectively?

______ Are local businesses and community organizations contacted to provide learning opportunities outside the school and to explore career options for high school students?

______ Has a local business (or other institution) been asked to "adopt" your school?

Other ______________________________

Checklist #4: Assessing the Parent-Teacher Relationship

(Answer "yes" or "no")

Principle #1: Classroom Climate

______ Are parent observers welcome in the classroom?

______ Are there any adult-sized chairs, besides the teacher's?

______ Is the classroom organized so that a parent can see what happens in it easily?

______ Are examples of every child's work displayed regularly?

Figure 13.1 *(continued)*

_______ Is the classroom routine written down and clearly posted?

Other ____

Principle #2: Communication

_______ Are parents informed at the beginning of the year how they can reach the teacher?

_______ Does the teacher tell parents about the good things, as well as the problems?

_______ Does the teacher try to communicate at least once a month with each family (less often in high school, but regularly)?

_______ Does the teacher talk to parents in person (or on the phone), in addition to sending written messages?

_______ Does the teacher provide regular opportunities for parents to see their child's written messages?

_______ Does the teacher let parents know of expectations for homework, grading policies, and how parents can help?

_______ Does the teacher let parents know what information about the child is needed to help teachers do a better job (e.g., family stress or major changes in family—illness, birth, death, divorce, etc.)?

Other ____

Principle #3: Parents as Collaborators

_______ Do teachers ask parents for their advice on how to deal with their children?

_______ Is there an early warning system for notifying parents if a student is falling behind and/or having social problems, so that teachers might confer with them about the situation?

_______ Before parents are informed about a serious problem, are other school staff consulted to gather their perspectives on the student?

_______ Are parents encouraged to advise teachers when a child is exhibiting a learning or school adjustment difficulty at home?

_______ In suggesting ways that parents can help at home, does the teacher take into account a student's particular background and situation?

_______ Do teachers make it clear to parents that parents must respect their need for time alone and with their own families?

_______ Do teachers help parents understand that their child's needs must be balanced with those of the whole class?

Other ____

Principle #4: Parents as Advisors and Decision Makers

_______ Are parents with questions and ideas about school policy encouraged to play an active role in the school?

_______ Do teachers attend parent-teacher organization meetings regularly?

_______ Do teachers listen actively to parents' concerns and pass them on to the principal and/or the parent-teacher organization president?

Figure 13.1 *(continued)*

______ Do teachers make it clear that some decisions about a child are not negotiable (e.g., grades, promotion)?

Other ______________________________

Principle #5: Outreach to All Families

______ Are teachers adequately trained and supported in their dealings with the problems of divorced families?

______ Do teachers make special efforts to reach families from other cultures (e.g., home visits, translators)?

______ Do teachers meet outside regular school hours, if necessary, with parents who are employed?

______ Are teachers persistent in their efforts to reach parents who try to avoid coming to school?

______ Will teachers make a home visit if that is the only way to meet a parent?

Other ______________________________

Principle #6: Volunteers

______ Do teachers use volunteers creatively (both parents and other citizens) to meet needs in the classroom?

______ Do teachers expect every parent to help in some way, and are parents offered a variety of ways to do so?

Other ______________________________

***Figure 13.1** (continued)*

Plan to Recruit, Train, and Use Volunteers

Activity	Person Responsible	Date	Evaluation Documentation
1. Community person serves as coordinator of volunteers	Principal	Sep. 1996	K. Burnett named coord. of volunteers
2. School staff member serves as volunteer liaison.	Principal	Sep. 1996	D. Pace named liaison
3. Parents and community persons will be recruited to serve as volunteers.	Coord. of volunteers, liaison	Fall 1996	List of volunteers
a. Delegated recruitment. First Methodist Church takes responsibility for recruiting volunteers for the tutorial program.	Principal, church officials	Fall 1996	
b. Individual recruitment. Past volunteers are called to return, and personal appeals are made to interested individuals.	Liason, coord. of volunteers	Fall 1996	
c. Public recruitment. Letters are sent to parents and community persons.	Liaison, coord. of volunteers	Fall 1996	
4. Interview volunteers, decide placement.	Liaisons, coord. of volunteers	Ongoing	Successful volunteers program
5. Plan activities for volunteers.	Liaison, coord. of volunteers	Ongoing	Successful volunteers program

Figure 13.2

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Plan to Recruit, Train, and Use Volunteers (con't)

Activity	Person Responsible	Date	Evaluation Documentation
6. Volunteers attend training sessions:	Liaison, coord. of volunteers	Fall 1996	Successful volunteers program
a. Orientation meetings: clerical classroom helpers minicourses			
b. Training sessions: tutors substitutes classroom aides	Liaison Principal, liaison, and teachers	Oct. 1996 Oct. 1996 Ongoing	Successful volunteers program
7. Implement volunteer work:	Coord. of volunteers	Ongoing	Accurate completion of requested successful classroom experiences
a. Clerical help			
b. Classroom aides	Coord. of volunteers, liaison, and teachers	Ongoing	
c. Tutorial program	Liaison, teachers	Ongoing	Improved classroom performance by the students
d. "Friends through Reading"	Resource director, liaison	Ongoing	Participation of community persons and students
e. Substitutes	Coord. of volunteers	Ongoing	Sub. availability Oct. 1996
f. Mini-course series	Coord. of volunteers, Principal	Ongoing	Participation by students and volunteers
8. Appreciation for volunteers:	Liaison, Principal	May 1997	Party held
a. Party for Liaison, tutors, and their students	Liaison	May 1997	
b. Party for other volunteers	Coord. of volunteers	May 1997	Certificate of Appreciation by PTA and school thank-you letters

Figure 13.2 (continued)

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Appendix 1

Suggested Books and Print Resources for a Parent Library

Books

Ages and Stages by Karen Miller, Scholastic Inc.

Alerta: A Multicultural, Bilingual Approach to Teaching Young Children by Leslie R. Williams and Yvonne Degaetano, Addison-Wesley 1985.

A Magic Encounter: Spanish Language Children's Literature in the Classroom by Alma Flor Ada, Santillana 1990.

A Parent's Guide to Early Childhood Education by Diane Trister Dodge and Joanna Phinney, Gryphon House.

A Very Practical Guide to Discipline with Young Children by Grace Mitchell, Scholastic Inc.

Before the Basics: Creating Conversations with Children by Bev Bos, Scholastic Inc.

Beginning to Read by Janet Morris and Linda Mort, Scholastic Inc.

Black Children: Their Roots, Culture and Learning Styles by Janice E. Hale-Benson, Johns Hopkins University Press 1986.

Caring: Supporting Children's Growth by R. M. Warren, National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Character Development: Encouraging Self-Esteem & Self Discipline in Infants, Toddlers, & Two-Year-Olds by Polly Greenberg, National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Childhood Symptoms: Every Parent's Guide to Childhood Illnesses by Edward R. Bruce and John P. Pacanowski, Harper Perennial.

Circle of Friends: People of Disabilities and Their Friends Enrich the Lives of One Another by Robert Perske, Watten/Poe Publishing.

Comics to Classics: A Parent's Guide to Books for Teens and Preteens by Arthea Reed, International Reading Association.

Don't Just Bake Cookies: A Handbook for Creative Volunteering in the Elementary School by Traci Maxted and Melinda Swezey Tomsic, Teacher Ideas Press, Libraries Unlimited.

Don't Move the Muffin Tins by Bev Bos, Scholastic Inc.

Do Touch: Instant, Easy Hands-On Learning Experiences for Young Children by LaBritta Gilbert, Gryphon House.

Emergency Medical Treatment: Children by National Safety Council, RPM International.

Exploring Art by Liz and Dick Wilmes, Gryphon House.

Families Writing by Peter Stillman, Heinemann.

Family Math by Jean K. Stenmark, Virginia Thompson, and Ruth Cossey, Watten/Poe Publishing.

Family Storybook Reading by Denny Taylor and Dorothy Strickland, Heinemann.

First Feelings: Milestones in the Emotional Development of Your Baby and Child by Stanley Greenspan, Scholastic Inc.

Free Stuff for Kids, Meadowbrook Press.

Games for Reading by Peggy Kaye, Watten/Poe Publishing.

Getting Men Involved by James Levine, Scholastic Inc.

Getting Your Child to Sleep . . . and Back to Sleep by Vicky Lansky, Book Peddlers.

Good Earth Art by MaryAnn Kohl and Cindy Gainer, Gryphon House.

Growing Up Writing: Teaching Our Child to Write, Think and Learn by Arlene Silberman, Heinemann.

Help! What Do I Do About . . . ? by Grace Mitchell, Scholastic Inc.

Hey! Listen to This: Stories to Read Aloud by Jim Trelease (ed.), Penguin Books.

How Children Play by Ingeborg Waller, Floris.

How to Generate Values in Young Children: Integrity, Honesty, Individuality, Self-Confidence, and Wisdom by S. S. Riley, National Association for the Education of Young Children.

I Learn to Read and Write the Way I Learned to Talk: A Very First Book About Whole Language by Marlene Barron, Watten/Poe Publishing.

Kids' Favorite Books: Children's Choices 1989–1991, International Reading Association.

Learning at Home: The Parent, Teacher, Child Alliance by Alex Griffiths and Dorothy Hamilton, Heinemann.

Letters to Marcia: A Teacher's Guide to Anti-Racist Education by Enid Lee, Cross-Cultural Communication Centre.

Literacy at Home and School by Vivienne Nicoll and Lyn Wilkie, Heinemann.

More Things to Do with Toddlers and Twos by Karen Miller, Scholastic Inc.

No Bored Babies by Jan Fisher Shea, Gryphon House.

Paint Without Brushes by Liz Wilmes and Dick Wilmes, Gryphon House.

Parenting a Path Through Childhood by Dotty Turner Coplen, Floris.

Parents Are Teachers, Too by Claudia Jones, Williamson.

Playing with Words by Margie Golick, Heinemann.

Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen, Sunrise Books.

Positive Discipline for Single Parents by Jane Nelsen, Cheryl Erwin, and Carol Delzer, Sunrise Books.

Raising Readers: Helping Your Child to Literacy by Steven Bialostok, Watten/Poe Publishing.

Reading Begins at Home by Dorothy Butler and Marie Clay, North American adaptation by Bobbye Goldstein, Heinemann.

Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read by Bernice Cullinan, Scholastic Inc.

Reducing Stress in Young Children's Lives by J. B. McCracken, ed., National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Sharing the Caring by Amy Laura Dombro and Patty Bryan, Scholastic Inc.

Teachables from Trashables, Redleaf Press.

Teachables II, Redleaf Press.

Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K-8. by Violet J. Harris, ed., Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.

Technology Activities by Jennie Davies, Scholastic Inc.

Teens Favorite Books: Young Adults' Choices 1987–1992, International Reading Association.

The Essential Partnership: How Parents and Children Can Meet the Emotional Challenges of Infancy and Childhood by Stanley Greenspan, Scholastic Inc.

The Kids' Nature Book by Susan Milord, Gryphon House.

The New Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease, Penguin Press.

The Outside Play and Learning Book by Karen Miller, Scholastic Inc.

The Wonderful World of Mathematics: A Critically Annotated List Children's Books in Mathematics by Diane Thiessen and Margaret Matthias, eds., National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Things to Do with Toddlers and Twos by Karen Miller, Scholastic Inc.

Valuing Diversity: The Primary Years by Janet Brown McCraken, NAEYC 1993.

Where Is the Thumbkin? by Pam Schiller and Thomas Moore, Gryphon House.

Whole Language for Second Language Learners by Yvonne S. Freeman and David S. Freeman, Heinemann 1992.

Who's Endangered on Noah's Ark? Literary and Scientific Activities for Teachers and Parents by Glenn McGlathery and Norma J. Livo, Teacher Ideas Press, Libraries Unlimited.

Workjobs . . . for Parents by Mary Baratta-Lorton, Addison-Wesley.

Writing Begins at Home: Preparing Children for Writing Before They Go to School by Marie Clay, Heinemann.

You Are Your Child's First Teacher by Rahima Baldwin, Gryphon House.

Parent Booklets

Beginning Literacy and Your Child by Steven B. Silvern and Linda R. Silvern, International Reading Association.

Creating Readers and Writers by Susan Mandell Glazer, International Reading Association.

Encouraging Your Junior High Student to Read by John Shefelbine, International Reading Association.

Helping Young Children Learn Self-Control by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Helping Your Child Become a Reader by Nancy L. Roser, International Reading Association.

How Can I Prepare My Young Child for Reading? by Paula C. Grinnel, International Reading Association.

Keeping Healthy: Parents, Teachers, and Children by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Media Violence and Children: A Guide for Parents by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Off to a Good Start! Ways Parents Can Help Children Get Ready to Begin School by the Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

The Parenting Series Booklets:

25 Ways Parents Can Build Children's Self-Esteem by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

25 Ways Parents Can Build Responsibility in Children by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

25 Ways Parents Can Help Children Learn by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

25 Ways Parents Can Motivate Children by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

25 Ways Parents Can Read with Children by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

25 Ways Parents Can Talk and Listen to Children by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Play is FUNdamental, by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Ready or Not: What Parents Should Know about School Readiness, by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The Skills for School Success Series Booklets

Building Homework Skills by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Critical Thinking by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Expressing Ideas in Speech and Writing by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Listening Well and Following Directions by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Reading for Meaning by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Problem Solving Skills by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Using Time Wisely by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

Working with Others by The Parent Institute, Fairfax Station, VA (also available in Spanish).

So Many Goodbyes: Ways to Ease the Transition between Home and Groups for Young Children, by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Teaching Young Children to Resist Bias: What Parents Can Do by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

You Can Help Your Young Child with Writing by Marcia Baghban, International Reading Association.

Your Child's Vision Is Important by Caroline Beverstock, International Reading Association.

Brochures

Eating Well Can Help Your Child Learn Better by Lillian Putnam, Laura Bursuk, and Doris Pertz, International Reading Association.

Good Books Make Reading Fun for Your Child by Glenna Davis Sloan, International Reading Association.

Literacy Development in Early Childhood (brochure available in single and bulk quantities), International Reading Association.

Studying: A Key to Success ... Ways Parents Can Help by Ann Erickson, International Reading Association.

Summer Reading Is Important by John Micklos Jr., International Reading Association.

You Can Help Your Child Connect Reading to Writing by Nicholas P. Criscuolo, International Reading Association.

You Can Help Your Child in Reading by Using the Newspaper by Nicholas P. Criscuolo, International Reading Association.

You Can Use Television to Stimulate Your Child's Reading Habits by Nicholas P. Criscuolo, International Reading Association.

Appendix 2

Videotapes for Parent Education

AGS Media, 800-328-2560

Name: *Growing Together*
Help parents understand and accept the responsibilities of parenthood. This innovative six-part video series presents real-life situations parents often face. It offers practical information on caring for infants during their first months of life.
Price: $249.95

Name: *Just Like You: Your Baby Is a Person*
Explores the concept of uniqueness and offers suggestions for building the mother's and baby's self-esteem.
Price: $45.95

Name: *Out of Danger: Your Baby's Safety*
Demonstrates the vulnerability of babies to dangerous situations and shows the steps a mother can take to protect her infant.
Price: $45.95

Name: *Good Food for a Good Start: Your Baby's Food*
Explains the principles of proper infant feeding and a healthy diet; also encourages the mother to eat healthy foods.
Price: $45.95

Name: *Strong and Healthy: Your Baby's Health*
Presents basic information on maintaining good health for both the mother and the infant. Includes information on when a doctor should be called.
Price: $45.95

Name: *What My Baby Can Do: Physical Development*
Covers normal physical development of infants so that the mother knows what to expect. She also learns how to assist her baby's development.
Price: $45.95

Name: *Feelings, Family, Friends: Social and Emotional Development*
Illustrates how to promote social and emotional well-being through play activities and positive relationships with family and friends.
Price: $45.95

AIT Audiovisual Marketing, 800-457-4509

Name: *Emergent Literacy: Kindergartners Write and Read*
The video introduces five forms of writing most commonly used by children as they progress from emergent to conventional methods:

- Scribble
- Drawing
- Nonphonetic letter strings
- Phonetic or invented spelling
- Conventional orthography

Price: $150

Name: *Childcare Providers Collection*

1. *Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and Emergency Procedures for Choking for Infants and Young Children.* Reinforces and reviews formal instruction.
2. *Clean Intermitted Catheterization.* Demonstrates techniques for care of males and females; explores teaching methods, medication, nutrition, progress monitoring.
3. *Feeding Infants and Young Children with Special Needs.* Examines importance of good eating skills, equipment, and safety precautions.
4. *Home Oxygen for Infants and Young Children.* Introduces home oxygen systems, demonstrates care, suggests safety precautions.
5. *Home Tracheostomy Care for Infants and Young Children.* Describes a tracheostomy; shows procedures for changing the trach tube, clothing, feeding, encouraging speech development; safety precautions.
6. *Infection Control in Childcare Settings.* Covers how illnesses spread; handwashing, diapering, and toileting procedures; and food preparation and feeding.
7. *Positioning for Infants and Young Children with Motor Problems.* Considers importance of positioning; demonstrates a number of activities.

Prices: $995, set of seven programs, each with user's manual and test packets. $190, program kit (single video, twelve user's manuals, and one test packet) $180, each program with one user's manual and one test packet.

Baby Talk, 217-475-2234

Name: *Babies & Books: A Joyous Beginning*
A videotape for parents stressing reading aloud and language interaction for infants and toddlers.
Price: $25

Curriculum Associates, 800-225-0248

Name: *Reading to Your Children* (Available in English and Spanish)
Shares benefits of reading aloud to children and strategies parents can use to read aloud to children.
* Price: $99

Name: *Supporting Your Beginning Reader* (in English and in Spanish)
Shares important characteristics of home environments that support literacy development.
* Price: $99

Name: *Reading and Study Skills at Home* (in English and in Spanish)
Discusses the importance of a home environment conducive to study and shares effective strategies for home use.
* Price: $99
* Set price, all three videos: $179

Delmar Publishers

Name: *Raising America's Children: A video series*

1. *The Nuturing Community.* Explores options for childrearing, including family and center-based child care.
2. *A Secure Beginning.* Follows the development of children's relationships to others.
3. *Relating to Others.* Examines positive ways that children develop age-appropriate social skills.
4. *Playing and Learning.* Shows stages of infant and preschool play as the natural way to learn.
5. *Listening and Talking.* Explains how language develops as a medium for communicating and thinking.
6. *Meeting Special Needs.* Focuses on the care and education of young children with special needs.

7. *Thinking and Creativity*. Explores the differences between adult's and children's thinking and describes the function of creative experiences.
8. *Healthful Habits*. Shows how to encourage good nutrition, sleep patterns, and other habits that promote wellness, in a variety of settings.
9. *Coping with Stress*. Examines ways that parents and caregivers can help children deal with stress by providing support and continuity.
10. *A Sense of Self*. Explores how adults and caregivers can enhance a child's positive self-concept from babyhood on.
    Price: $749: Individual tapes: $85

Name: *Health, Safety, and Nutrition for the Young Child, 3E*
Comprehensive coverage of the essential aspects of health, safety, and nutrition for young children. Examines the interrelatedness of health, safety, and nutrition issues for children—including infants, toddlers, and children with special needs—while incorporating the most current developments and research in the childcare field.

Major features:

- Health promotion for children is stressed, with the inclusion of important assessment information and educational experiences for children
- Emphasis is given to the topic of quality childcare and organizing quality care environments for children
- Increased coverage of contemporary issues and concerns includes children with HIV/AIDS, crack babies, SIDS, updated RDA requirements, infant and toddler feeding, techniques for controlling the spread of communicable diseases, and establishing safe environments for young children
- Easy-to-read immunization schedules have been included, as well as discussions of the most recent changes in emergency first-aid techniques
- Content will help adults assist young children to develop good habits and attitudes and to assume lifelong responsibility for their own well-being
- Information on the importance of prenatal nutrition has been added

Price: $29.95

Educational Productions, 800-950-4949

Name: *Let's Talk—First Steps to Conversation*
Talking successfully with young children takes more than just using words. The film teaches important communication skills that adults sometimes over-

look when trying to talk with young children. It shows how to encourage young children and help them feel comfortable and interested in talking. The program features both preschool teachers and speech-language pathologists working with children with a wide range of language skills.
Key teaching points—Viewers will learn:

- How to show a child you want to talk
- How to start a conversation of interest to a child
- How to avoid asking questions that stop conversations
- How to correct a child's speech/language errors in a positive way

Price: $295

Name: *Now You're Talking: Techniques That Extend Conversations*
Children need many opportunities to practice using language. But having productive conversations with young children takes skill. Once we've engaged children, how do we extend conversation? How do we draw children out so they'll want to share their ideas and feelings?

In this film, teachers in a language-based preschool and a speech-language pathologist model effective techniques that focus and extend conversations.
Key teaching points—Viewers will learn:

- What topics children want to talk about
- How to add to the child's topic and extend conversations
- How to ask questions that stimulate thinking and problem-solving
- How to support all a child's efforts to communicate

Price: $295

Name: *Oh Say What They See: An Introduction to Indirect Language Stimulation Techniques*
Indirect Language Stimulation Techniques are really very simple ways to talk with young children from one to four, or older, ways to support each child's process of acquiring language.

These easy-to-learn techniques are helpful to both children who are developing as expected and those with special needs.

In the film viewers watch speech-language pathologists showing a young mother how to use these basic techniques with her language-delayed son.

"Before" and "after" sessions show how the mother gains skill, how her son responds, and how changes in their interactions promote language growth.
Key teaching points—Viewers will learn:

- How children acquire language
- How we help children build receptive and expressive language by talking with them
- How to help children build vocabulary by giving them word labels for things they touch and see
- How to follow a child's lead in conversation and encourage talking

Price: $295

Name: *What About Me? Brothers and Sisters of Children with Disabilities*
Viewers will see powerful interviews with children of different ages and their parents and their brothers and sisters with disabilities. And in a sibling support group, a number of articulate and eloquent young people also share their feelings ranging from frustration and depression to loyalty and love. Children in the film express many concerns, including:

- Having to bear many responsibilities from an early age, often while getting less attention from parents
- Worrying about their parents' feelings, responsibilities, and ability to cope
- Wishing their brother or sister was not disabled; dealing with friends' attitudes toward their brother or sister
- Feelings of being left out, of being different; having less time to play and participate in activities
- Positive feelings about their brother or sister and the effect on their lives

Price: $250

Name: *A Place for Me: Planning for the Future*
For most parents whose children have developmental disabilities, thoughts of the future bring many questions. What will happen when my child is grown? Where will he live? How will he manage?

This thought-provoking program brings to light many of the things parents must consider. In the film, we listen to families with sons and daughters from eight to thirty-one years old. We learn about their special concerns and see what actions they've taken.

A Place for Me encourages all parents to take important steps now to ensure the best for their children's future. Key issues addressed:

- The need to learn what further educational opportunities exist
- The importance of exploring independent living and group housing options long before they're needed
- The need to learn about future training and employment opportunities
- The importance of joining organizations that work for the rights of children with developmental disabilities

Price: $250

Name: *Child's Play: The World of Learning*
Viewers can take a closer look at what's happening when children play, to see how everyday play activities, at home and at school, help children gain skills and knowledge.

Child's Play is a powerful resource that shows viewers—teachers, administrators, parents, students, and aides—that providing children with rich and varied play experience is the very best way to help them learn. Key teaching points:

- How play helps build thinking and language skills, large and small motor skills, and social-emotional skills
- How play helps children prepare for academic learning and supports the development of literacy
- How children playing gradually build the foundation for reading and writing through growth in oral language, learning to love books, and gaining an understanding of print

Price: $295

Name: *Time Together: Learning to Play with Young Children*

When a child asks "Will you play with me?" many adults aren't sure how to begin. What's the most fun for the child? How can adults "play" without taking over?

The film helps adults understand their role in play and shows how to join play, keep children involved, and support the natural process of learning that's part of every play experience.

Time Together teaches simple techniques that help all adults—parents, teachers, and students—become good play partners.

Key teaching points:

- When to join a child's play and when to step back, learning the level of involvement that's appropriate
- How to follow the child's lead during play, ways to avoid taking over a child's play
- How to help children focus on their play so they can stay involved, to explore, discover, and learn more

Price: $295

Name: *Read to Me: Sharing Books with Young Children*

Today, educators everywhere are calling for parents to read to young children. But how do we convince parents to read aloud for just a few minutes every day?

The film shows the power, value, and delight of the read-aloud experience. Watch children from one to eight years old, captivated by their parent's reading. See how by simply cuddling up and reading stories, parents introduce children to the world of books, sparking excitement about learning to read.

Read to Me shows the rich learning embedded in relaxing, enjoyable read-aloud times, and in critical skills children need to become successful readers and writers.

It's clear that reading aloud is one of the most important gifts any parent can give. It's simple, easy, and inexpensive—and children love it!

Key teaching points:

- How being read to fosters a love of books
- How reading aloud helps children develop language and literacy skills

- How children who have been read to are most likely to succeed in school
- Basic guidelines for making read-aloud time stimulating and fun

Price: $295

Name: *Between You and Me: Facilitating Child-to-Child Conversations*
Conversations between children seem so simple, but to participate a child must be able to use a number of important communication skills. Here's the dilemma: To learn these skills, a child needs to be involved in conversations; yet he can't take part unless he already has the skills. This is where adults can help.

The film shows how adults can act as facilitators, helping both language-normal and language-delayed children talk to each other.

Key teaching points:

- How to help children attend to each other in conversations
- How to help children establish and maintain a topic
- How to refer questions and comments from one child to another
- How to interpret for children who lack speech or language skills

Price: $295

Name: *Someday's Child: A Focus on Special Needs of Children and Their Families*
Three families share their experiences caring for their children—who range from premature twins who need early intervention services to help them "catch up" to children with severe disabilities.

In this moving documentary, parents reach out to talk to professionals and other parents about these key issues addressed:

- The difficulty in finding needed resources and someone to coordinate care for their children
- The importance of talking with other parents, getting support, sharing ideas and concerns
- How parents' observations, feelings, and concerns are an essential part of planning programs to serve children with disabilities
- The need for professionals to provide encouragement and recognition of how parents play a pivotal role in augmenting the therapy and education of their children
- How children with disabilities are "like" rather than "different from" other children—how they also bring new perspectives and many positive experiences to families

Price: $250

Filmakers Library, 212-808-4980, Fax 212-808-4983

Name: *Father*
Fathers of young children face a series of challenges: The pressure of working often conflicts with the desire and expectation to participate in bringing up their children.

In this film, the Citizen 2000 fathers talk about their involvement in their children's lives, how much time they manage to spend with their children, and whether they pull their weight with the family responsibilities.
Price: $350

Name: *You Must Have Been a Bilingual Baby*
This documentary investigates how babies become bilingual, how school children fare in language immersion classes, and how adults cope with learning foreign languages.

Acquiring a second language seems an insurmountable task for adults, yet children do it effortlessly. "The younger you are the easier it is to acquire not just language but any kind of skill," says Dr. Michael Paradis, a specialist in brain studies and bilingualist at McGill University. The film shows how toddlers in a two-language family feel comfortable in both languages.

The documentary takes us to a bilingual classroom in Virginia, where Spanish- and English-speaking children learn together while developing a sense of pride in their respective cultures. It also shows us an adult program where people have the satisfaction of attaining fluency in a second language. An important film for school of education, language department, and bilingual programs.
Price: $395

Name: *Newborn with Dr. Berry Brazelton*
This film documents the extraordinary capabilities of the newborn. It demonstrates the infant's readiness to face challenges, perceive its environment, and establish its individuality. Having begun to learn in the womb, the baby is particularly alert in the first few hours after birth—and is far from helpless.

Neonatal researchers Drs. Berry Brazelton, Lewis Lipsitt, and Louis Standers demonstrate the components of normal infant development and how these are measured. We see that the various reflexes used later for crawling, walking, and exploring are already present at birth.

The film goes beyond the strictly physical, for it is a celebration of the wonder of new life and the "bonding" of mother and child.
Price: $295

Name: *Music and Early Childhood*
This film makes a strong case for beginning music education at a very early age because of its importance as a precursor to language skills. As Howard Gardner, professor of psychology at Harvard University, points out, human beings have seven categories of intelligence, and music is one of them.

We hear from experts, including John Fierabend, associate professor at the Hartt School of Music; Humphrey Tonkin, president of Harvard University; and Edwin Gordon, professor of music, Temple University, who all confirm that the earlier a child is exposed to music and rhythm, the more naturally these talents will develop. If unused, music ability can atrophy.

The film shows groups of very young children happily engaged in musical activity. Mothers are usually part of these sessions, learning how to encourage new skills. Years ago, before television and two-career parents, many of these songs and games were part of daily life at home. As Professor Fierabend says: If we make music part of our children's life, it will enrich their adult lives. This film will interest music educators, child development experts, curriculum specialists, and parents.
Price: $295

Name: *Toys*
To what extent do the toys that children play with affect their attitudes and capabilities? Do boys' toys breed aggression, while girls' toys breed passivity? Several noted psychologists address these questions, including Dr. Jerome Kagan and Prof. Howard Gardner of Harvard University, Prof. Bryan Sutton-Smith of the University of Pennsylvania, and Prof. Nancy Carlsson-Paige of Lesley College.

Our world has seen a dramatic change in the kinds of toys available to children. From the simple building blocks and stuffed toys of yesteryear, we now have battery-operated toys that simulate reality, often violently, and computer-operated games that challenge a child's skills. But do children really learn from such toys, or are the toys a prop for them to exercise their ability to control their world?

Child's play is child's work. This program airs divergent views of educators, from those who feel that natural materials like wood, stones, and acorns are the only proper toys to those who believe that a child's world should be full of complicated objects, since this reflects the real world.
Price: $350

Name: *Self-Esteem and How We Learn*
This program focuses on the critical school-age years, especially adolescence, when self-image is tested in an environment outside the loving circle of the home. The teacher may play a pivotal role in helping the young person feel accepted and productive. These feelings are insurance policies against education failure, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and crime. Eminent psychologist

Dr. H. Stephen Glenn points out that it only takes one close relationship with a faculty member to turn around a potentially alienated student. We see a model school in action where students and teachers work and learn with mutual respect.
Price: $295

Name: *Giftedness: With Ups and Downs*
Many schools are not equipped to recognize the special child who is "gifted." Ironically, as this film shows, these students can be troubled and troublesome, both to their teachers, their peers, and their parents.

Although educators have focused on the learning-disabled, they too often neglect these other "special" children.

The film profiles two gifted children, Yvonne and Jos, whose intellectual talents went unrecognized. Instead they were frustrated and rebellious at school, and even considered to have behavior disorders. Jos, in fact, was sent to a school for children with learning disabilities and behavior problems. Each child was finally referred to a counseling service for evaluation. Now they have both been put in an appropriate academic setting where they can use their capacities to the fullest.
Price: $295

Name: *Who Cares for the Children? Childcare in America*
Nearly eighty percent of mothers with preschool-age children are now in the workforce. Yet, as this film shows, quality childcare during these critical developmental years is either unavailable or too expensive.

Through the eyes of parents, providers, children, and experts, *Who Cares for the Children?* examines the current childcare crisis. It shows that childcare costs are generally the second highest expense of the typical American family, just below housing. Yet the wages of childcare providers are so low that turnover is a staggering forty percent a year.

The film travels across the country showcasing model programs. From corporate on-site care to programs to assist welfare parents, we see that innovative solutions to the childcare dilemma are available.
Price: $350

Film for the Humanities and Sciences, 800-257-5126

Name: *Family Math*
This program explains family math, a popular new program based on the premise that parent involvement is crucial to students' success in math.
Price: $149

Name: *Latch-Key Families*
Some ten million American youngsters of school age are now "latch key" children. This program offers specific guidance to working parents with children who are on their own after school. Educational and law enforcement specialists explain how parents can provide for the physical safety and emotional needs of their children and how rules for conduct can best be set and chores assigned, so that the experience can help teach children maturity and independence.
Price: $89.95

Name: *Just Say "Know"*
This drug education program features students of the New York City Public School System speaking candidly, as children do, about their feelings regarding the dangers of drugs to their lives and the importance of knowing how to cope with those dangers. Knowledge is what underlies the positive methods of preventing substance abuse by building self-esteem, avoiding the pitfalls of negative peer pressure, and helping both child and parent build the strong family values without which this battle is lost more often than not.
Price: $149

Name: *Teaching Beginning Readers and Writers*
This program, whose infectious power comes from the creativity of teachers and the enthusiasm of children, takes viewers into kindergarten and first-grade classrooms where whole-language teachers demonstrate strategies children use to become readers and writers. It covers three basic cuing systems, theme-based child-centered activities, the use of high-quality children's literature, big-book oral reading, peer teaching, guided writing, response journals, and the use of invented spelling in children's first-draft writing.
Price: $149

Name: *Drop Everything and Read*
Meredith Baxter-Birney and David Birney host this program that shows why reading is an essential lifelong asset. Presented are the experiences and the practical guidance of famous and ordinary Americans who have found reading both pleasurable and vitally necessary. With Patty Duke, LeVar Burton, Mister Rogers, and Marva Collins.
Price: $149

Name: *What Is Whole Language?*
This program deals with the fundamental questions and controversies surrounding the philosophy of whole-language teaching. A studio-audience of teachers and parents respond to a panel of educators: an educational consultant, a principal of a whole-language school, school board members, and a professor of education.
Price: $149

International Reading Association, 800-336-READ, ext. 266

Name: *Read to Me*
Introduces parents to the importance of reading aloud to their children and shows strategies for book selecting and oral reading. Produced by the Idaho Literacy Project.
Price: $30

KERA-TV, 800-368-KERA

Name: *Parents, Kids and Books*
Describes the importance of reading aloud and demonstrates effective strategies for reading aloud in the home.
Price: $19.95

KidSafety of America, 800-524-1156

Name: *Child Safety at Home*
Provides a comprehensive guide to child safety in the home. Topics include choking, burns, bleeding, drowning, shock, poisoning, falls, convulsions, and more. Information on causes and prevention of accidents, first-aid tips, and emergency preparedness. (Also available in Spanish.)
Price: $69.95

Name: *Child Safety Outdoors*
Includes important steps to prevent outdoor injury. Topics include car safety, playground, tricycle, and child CPR. Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Also available in Spanish. Close captioned for the hearing impaired.)
Price: $69.95

Name: *On Fire: A Family Guide to Fire Safety*
Easy-to-follow demonstrations of proper usage of fire extinguishers, ladders, and smoke detectors. Shows how to develop a family escape plan. (Close captioned for the hearing impaired.)
Price: $29.95

Name: *Home and On Your Own*
For families with school-aged children who are "latch key" kids. Provides training for parents and children in the skills essential to self-care.
Price: $49.95

Name: *Dental Care for Kids*
An adult's guide to children's teeth: how they develop, the care they need, and the diseases that can spoil a child's mouth. Covers proper eating habits, brushing and flossing, and when to visit the dentist.
Price: $59.95

Learner Managed Designs, Inc., 913-842-9088

Name: *A Circle of Inclusion*
A moving and engaging program that sets forth a compelling rationale for inclusive early childhood education. This documentary-style video shows how inclusion has become a reality for young children with severe disabilities by focusing on three youngsters as they participate with typically developing peers in early childhood classrooms.
Price: $99

Magna Systems, 800-203-7060

Name: *Unit D*

1. *Meeting the Needs of Children: Early Childcare and Education.* Choices in childcare and early education, quality in early childhood programs, issues in early childhood education, factors in child abuse.
2. *Child in the Family.* Functions of the family, diversity in family structures and parenting roles, stress and change within the family, teen parenting, cultural influences, parenting styles, and effective parenting.
3. *Nutrition.* The food pyramid, nutrients, and optimal nutrition; developmental issues concerning nutrition during pregnancy, infancy, childhood, and adolescence.
4. *Exceptional Children.* Defining, classifying, and identifying exceptional children; causes of exceptionalities; effects of society's labels; emerging programs; roles of the classroom teacher and of the family.

Price: $139

Name: *Unit E*

1. *Toddlerhood/Early Childhood—Toddlerhood: Physical and Cognitive Development.* Physical growth and motor development, cognitive and language development, environment for language learning.
2. *Toddlerhood: Emotional Development.* Autonomy, shame, and doubt; socialization through meeting biological needs, handling emotions, and social interaction.
3. *Preschoolers: Physical and Cognitive Development.* Gross and fine motor skills, perceptual development, ways of learning, and characteristics of preschool thinking, new uses of language.

4. *Preschoolers: Social and Emotional Development.* Emotional and social development, fears and stress, prosocial behavior and aggression, developing conscience, socialization.

Price: $139

Name: *Unit F*

1. *Significant Areas of Development—Play.* The importance of play in the lives of children from infancy to middle childhood. The significance of play to all areas of development. Content and social dimensions of play and the role of the adult in enhancing play.
2. *Language Development.* The functions of language development, development of language and literacy (reading and writing) from infancy through adolescence, the role of the adult in supporting language and literacy development, social and cultural factors in language learning and usage.
3. *Self Identity and Sex Role Development.* Development of self, group, and gender identity throughout childhood; theories of cultural and societal influences on sex role concepts and behaviors, sex role behaviors seen in play of young children.
4. *Moral Development.* Components of the moral code, essentials for moral development, theories, strengthening moral development.

Price: $139

NAESP Educational Products, 703-684-3345

Name: *The Little Things Make a Big Difference*

This video speaks directly to parents, with scenes of families and engaging interviews with children discussing their parents. Parents are shown reading with children, setting daily routines for chores and homework, and attending school conferences.

Price: $19.95

Scholastic, Inc., 800-631-1586

Name: *Floor Time: Tuning In to Each Child*

Floor Time demonstrates, in live-action video, how we can help children develop emotionally, socially, and cognitively. This innovative, practical staff-training/parent-orientation program helps foster self-esteem, ease separation, build a foundation for learning, and strengthen parent-teacher-child communication.

Price: $74.95

Sunburst Communications, 800-431-1934

Name: *Building Parent Involvement: Elementary Grades*
With Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., codirector, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University; and Edward T. Joyner, director, Comer Project for Change in Education, Yale University Child Study Center. Shows two schools with fully developed programs for involving parents in students' education and creating school-family partnerships. Some areas covered are why parent involvement is important, types of parent involvement, importance of school-family communication, and innovative strategies for involving parents.
Price: $149

Name: *I Get So Mad*
Grade level: K–2. When young children get angry, their strong feelings can propel them into inappropriate or destructive behavior. Program makes students aware that anger is a natural emotion everyone experiences at times and shows them that it's not the getting angry that counts but what they decide to do about it. Offers easy-to-understand ways to cope. Lively songs and follow-up discussion questions frame each scenario, as a storyteller moves the action along.
Price: $89

Name: *Wonderful Me*
Grade level: K–2. The way children feel about themselves is a determining factor in their willingness to take the positive risks that build self-esteem. Using lively songs, scenarios close to student experience, and a storyteller to reinforce the points, this program shows young children effective strategies they can use to feel good about themselves, so that they can say "Wonderful me!" and truly mean it.
Price: $89

Name: *Let's Talk about Drugs*
Grade level: K–2. Shows younger students that the way to stay healthy and happy lies in caring for and protecting their bodies. Using lively songs, the video steers viewers away from drugs that can hurt them and toward the correct use of medicines that help.
Price: $89

Name: *My Family, Your Family*
Grade level: K–2. Emily has a mother, a father, and a brother. Sam's mom is a single parent. Cindy has a mother, father, stepfather, stepbrothers, and a half-sister. Pointing out that there are all kinds of families, the program helps students understand that what makes a family a family doesn't depend on who's in it but on the caring feelings members have for one another.
Price: $89

Name: *Everyone Gets Scared Sometime*
Grade level: K–2. Using lively songs, scenarios close to student experience, and a storyteller to move the action along, the program helps students understand that while fear can take many forms, they can get it under control and that it may even be useful for keeping out of danger.
Price: $89

Name: *Saying Good-Bye*
Grade level: 2–4. Using the sudden death of a classroom pet as a taking-off point, deals with the subject of death clearly, openly, and honestly. Reassures viewers that grief is normal and needs to be expressed.
Price: $89

Name: *Feeling Good about Me*
Grade level: 2–4. This upbeat program helps young viewers build a stronger self-image by learning to value their own uniqueness and create positive experiences. Situations students can easily identify with, along with discussion questions and lively songs, teach positive steps to self-esteem.
Price: $89

Name: *We're Family*
Grade level: 2–4. Designed to help children feel comfortable with their family and accept that others may be different. Introduces students to the idea that families come in many different forms, from nuclear to blended to step to single-parent families. Shows viewers that no matter what its structure, a family is the people who care for and about you and offer you security and love. Illustrates different problems that can arise in different families and offers some solutions: how being an only child or living in an extended family can have advantages and disadvantages; how having both a real dad and a stepdad can be difficult yet rewarding; how even though your mom is a single parent you still qualify as a family; and how living in a stepfamily can bring its own special pleasures.
Price: $89

The Parent Institute, 800-756-5525

(Video prices range from $59 each for a single video to $28 for 50+ videos.)

Name: *Building Self-Esteem in Children*
Practical strategies for helping children learn from their failures and see their achievements. Also includes ways to use praise.

Name: *Ways Parents Can Read with Children*
Great ideas for establishing good reading habits with children. Parents will learn ideas for stimulating interest in reading and for showing how reading helps them every day.

Name: *Ways Parents Can Build Responsibility in Children*
Shows key steps to teaching children that what they do—or don't do—really matters. Essential skills for good citizenship.

Name: *Ways Parents Can Motivate Children and Help Them Do Better in School*
Emphasizes success rather than failure, helping students break down assignments into smaller manageable parts, and making students aware of the verbal and nonverbal messages that can be given unknowingly to children.

Name: *Ways Parents Can Talk and Listen to Children*
Simple things parents can do in everyday life to help keep the lines of communication open . . . even when time is scarce.

William Gladden Foundation, 800-795-7475

Name: *Touchpoints*
Touchpoints are periods of time that precede a rapid growth for both parent and child, critical to future development. These informative videos show how and why children develop the way they do.

1. 9030V. Pregnancy, birth, and the first weeks of life
2. 9031V. First month through first year
3. 9032V. One year through toddlerhood

Price: $44.95; Individual tapes: $19.95

About the Authors...

Kathy Barclay

A former teacher, reading specialist, and supervisor of reading for the Louisiana State Department of Education, Kathy Barclay is currently a professor of elementary education and reading at Western Illinois University. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in parent and community involvement, reading, and early childhood education, and maintains close contacts with both public and private elementary schools through her work as an educational consultant, staff developer, and classroom researcher. Active in various professional organizations—including the Association for Childhood Education International, National Association for the Education of Young Children, International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, and Whole Language Umbrella—she is a frequent presenter at state and national conferences and publishes widely in professional journals.

Elizabeth Boone

Elizabeth Boone is the principal of Bluemont Elementary School in Manhattan, Kansas, and the former principal of Oakwood Elementary School in Hannibal, Missouri. She has extensive teaching experience in public elementary schools and, through commitment to professional development, has furthered her own education in whole language and administration. A frequent presenter at professional conferences, she speaks on issues of accountability, parent and community involvement, putting purpose in children's writing, and the many steps toward whole-language implementation. She is actively involved in various professional organizations and serves as a member of the board of directors for the Whole Language Umbrella. Her accomplishments have earned awards from the National Council of Teachers of English and Teachers Applying Whole Language. The whole-language program at Oakwood Elementary School was featured as the cover story in *Newsweek*, August 1990.

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